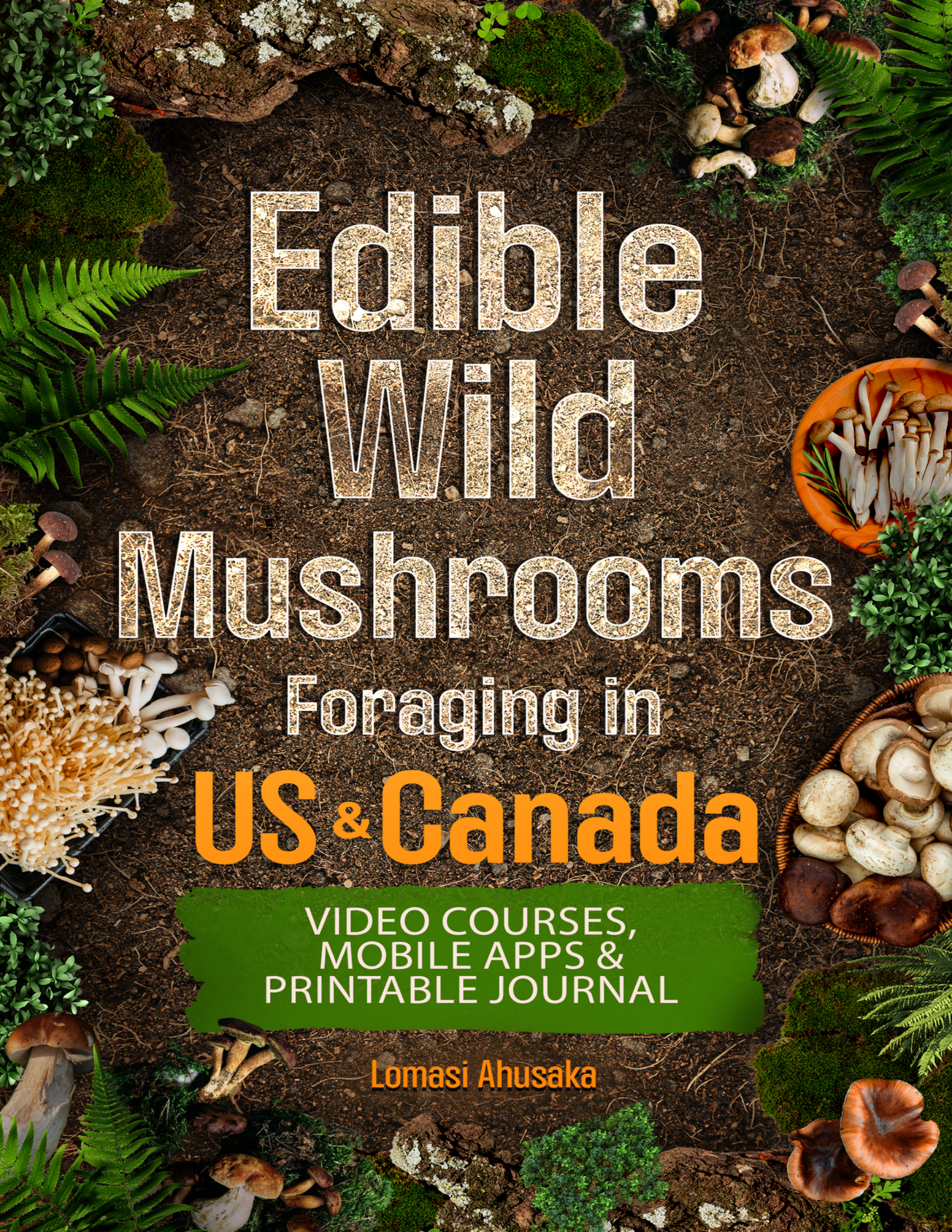
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Edible Wild Mushrooms Foraging

in US & Canada

Learn How to Identify Safely and Harvest Nature's Fungal Bounty

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INTRODUCTION

There is a certain level of primeval satisfaction when you are able to successfully forage for berries, herbs, and other edible plants in the woods. You may have purchased this book with the intent to learn more about how to properly forage in the woods and fields around you for the sustainable produce that nature has provided. While there is certainly a vast amount of greenery from which you could make your choices, not all plants are edible and if you are unguided as to how to properly tell apart edible from inedible plants, you may find yourself in a pickle. Some plants are truly edible, while others have parts that are edible while the other parts may be toxic to consume. This book serves to be a guide by which you will be able to safely forage for sustainable and ecologically friendly produce and live off the land successfully. You would be able to save on grocery bills since you would be able to source your produce from nature itself.

1 THE MADNESS FOR MUSHROOMS

The presence of mushrooms on dishes tends to polarize the people at a dinner table. There are those who are accustomed to the consumption of mushrooms that enjoy the meaty texture and savor the umami that a variety of mushrooms bring to a dish. On the other hand, however, there are also individuals who squirm at the thought of the consumption of the mushroom, as what a mushroom lover would call meaty texture, others would call it spongy. Of course, there are a variety of techniques and dishes where one could use mushrooms, and that is the beauty of them, as they lend themselves well to a variety of culinary preparations. The home cook would utilize the mushrooms in a cream-based soup. Italian families would utilize the mushrooms in a risotto, and as the base of a flavorful stock which can be used to add flavor to other types of food added to it. The Eastern Europeans have found numerous uses for mushrooms, in their fresh and dried forms, and likewise the East Asians such as the Japanese and Chinese have ubiquitous uses for mushrooms in their respective culinary repertoires. The appreciation of mushrooms then, can be categorized into those who are deemed to be mushroom lovers, known as mycophiles. Those who are deterred from the consumption of mushrooms are referred to as mycophobes. It is possible to simplify this into a dichotomy, yes, as there are cultures that have utilized the mushroom as a food, as Continental Europe and East Asia have done. There are also cultures where one has to forage for mushrooms is completely foreign, such as the United Kingdom and its colonies. However, such statements cannot be wholly cut and dried as they are made out to be, as mushrooms have showcased as to how versatile they can be. Soups, risottos are just some of the preparations that show the full-bodied flavor of the mushroom, yet there are more innovative presentations such as mushroom steaks and mushroom shawarmas that would give carnivores a taste of the earthly delights that mushrooms can bring to the table. People can change over time, and as time progresses, more people begin to see the beauty of a walk in the woods, in the search to find the mushrooms that spring from the damp earth. This is easier said than done, however. While there are numerous mushroom species that are widely considered edible, there are also

numerous species that are quite deadly that consumption of the mushroom, if improperly done, would lead to fatal consequences. Hence, this book serves as a guide to ensure that the forager and any would be mushroom picker would have the sufficient knowledge that the mushrooms that were chosen are safe to eat. If there are doubts however, it would also be ideal to seek the help of an experienced forager, or a mycologist who can aid in the identification of the mushroom that was picked. It is better to go the extra mile in the identification process to ensure that the forager lives to pick mushrooms another day.

1.1 What is a Mushroom?

A mushroom, In the botanical sense, is the fruiting body of a fungus, that is the most visible part as it grows above ground. Mushrooms are different from plants, and belong to a different kingdom altogether, as they are fungi, not plants. Mushrooms, for one, do not have chlorophyll, the pigmentation that causes plants to be green, and allows the leaves of the plant to convert sunlight into energy that the plant needs to thrive. This means, that the mushroom relies on other species for it to be able to obtain the nutrients that it needs, hence, the forager would encounter the mushrooms as growths on trees or ensconced around the roots of trees and other organisms. The mushroom obtains its nutrients through the absorption of the said nutrients from the medium that it grows in. Hence, this could either be soil, or wood in the midst of decay, which is another common site in the woodlands where the mushrooms thrive. The body of the mushroom is comprised of numerous fibers referred to as the mycelium. Individually, the fibers are referred to as hyphae, or hypha in the singular. The individual fibers penetrate the surface on which the mushrooms grow and allow the mushroom to thrive not only in the trees and decayed wood, but also unusual places such as manure heaps, fallen leaves and twigs. It was mentioned that the mushrooms that the forager sees are the fruiting bodies, this means that the hyphae of the fungus thrive underneath the ground or the surface on which the mushroom grows, until such time that it is the right season for the mushroom that one sees, to make its appearance above ground. The fruiting season of the mushroom is dependent as some last for only a few weeks, while others last several months. It becomes possible to identify the area wherein a mushroom grows through the location and identification of the fairy rings on the ground. The fairy rings, named for the initial misconception that they were created by fairies, are the areas in which the hyphae of the fungus grow. These gradually expand outwards as the hyphae seek out new nutrients. In the area demarcated by the fairy rings, once the fruiting season commences, the hyphae send out the mushrooms to spread the spores from which the fungus is able to replicate itself. The fruiting body of the mushroom comes in a variety of forms. The cook would be familiar with the more common button mushrooms,

as well as shiitake, wood ear, matsutake, beech mushrooms, shimeji mushrooms, chanterelles, chestnut mushrooms and the portobello. Foragers would be familiar with the hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, the morels, puffballs, and even the black and white truffles, within which the soul of the earth is embodied. Therefore, one can expect a large variety of appearances that would help distinguish one mushroom from another and help identify and ascertain if the mushroom is edible or not.

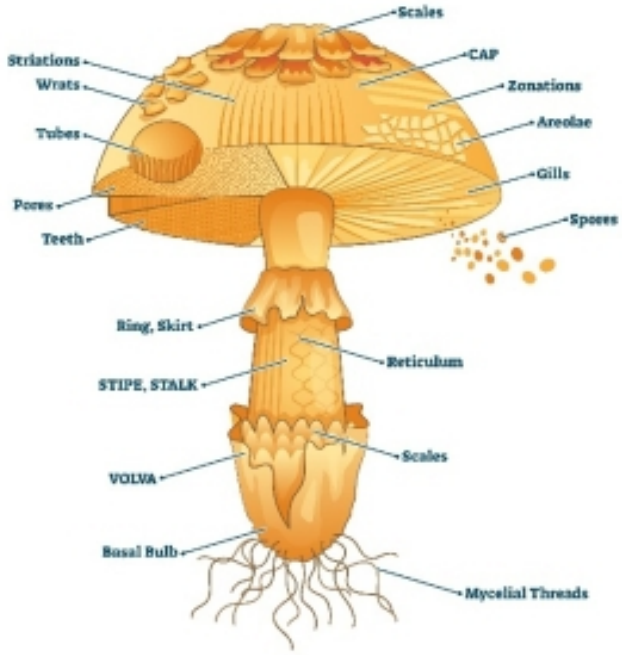
1.2 Types of Fungi

This may seem to be a smidge of a biology lesson, but with regards to mushrooms, it becomes necessary to fully understand what the mushroom is, and its characteristics, as not only does it help the forager properly identify what each mushroom is, it also helps the forager know where to find more of the same mushroom due to the knowledge of their reproductive characteristics. Luckily, there are two main categorizations for the mushrooms that are to be identified in this book: The Ascomycetes and the Basidiomycetes. Why would their categorizations be considered important? For one, the Ascomycetes group produces spores that are generally carried by the wind, and therefore, one could find more of the same mushroom under this group, downwind from where the original mushroom was found. Morels are a popular mushroom that are under this categorization, and one would have to locate them downwind from where a morel was found to find more. The summer truffle is another, though in the tradition of truffle hunting, one would need to utilize a sniffer hound, or better yet a pig. On an aside, it would be important to ensure that one, the dog does not inadvertently ruin the area while it digs, and that the pig does not consume the truffle once it has been located.

The Basidiomycetes group, in contrast, are more plentiful, and are further divided into the Agaric and Boletus families. The Agaric mushroom emanates from a bag-like structure known as the volva, and one should exercise the most extreme caution with these types of growths as it is from this type of structure that the most poisonous mushrooms stem from. The Agaric-type fungus is enclosed by what is called a universal veil, while a partial veil covers the gills of the mushroom. When the mushroom grows, the universal veil is ruptured, where it leaves behind the volva, and there are fragments on the cap of the mushroom. The partial veil also ruptures and leaves behind a ring on the stem of the mushroom. The Boletus-type fungi do not have gills, like the other mushrooms, but contain tubes and pores that come in a variety of colors. These mushrooms are similar to the Agarics in that they decay easily and are rather fleshy in texture. This is a characteristic that distinguishes it from the Polypores. For the Boletus type of mushrooms, the forager must take

note of the color of the mushroom to determine what mushroom they have obtained. The Porcini mushroom is one of the more well-known types of this group. There is a third group of fungi that are referred to as the Aphylloporales, the group that contains the Polypores, and the Chanterelles as well as other types of mushrooms that possess an irregular shape. Some of these include the hedgehog fungus- which has spines rather than gills, and from which it derives its name. The cauliflower fungus may seem alien in sight but is considered to be a culinary delicacy. The beefsteak fungus and the Chicken of the Woods Mushrooms are classified under this categorization and in themselves are considered to be culinary delights themselves.

1.3 The Parts of the Mushroom



The knowledge of the parts of the mushroom is integral to the success in the location and identification of edible species, so the reader will understand if this part reads more of a biology book, as it is better to ascertain that the mushroom collected is one that will feed, rather than poison. That said, the most apparent part of the mushroom is the fruiting body. The visibility and the fact that it contains the more obvious parts that can be visibly identified is one of the more important characteristics that aid in the identification of safe mushrooms. There are several species that bear similar appearances so one should not readily pick up a species that looks edible on the basis of the cap alone. The cap itself may contain gills or pores, and it is essential that these be identified in accordance with color, and if they are crowded together or are more widely spaced. The stem is another part of the mushroom that should be considered, as the presence of a veil on the stem is a clear indicator that this mushroom should not be touched nor used. Similarly, as discussed earlier in this chapter about the Agaric-type of Basidiomycetes mushrooms, that once the forager has dug around the mushroom and positively identified the presence of a volva, the mushroom located should be discarded immediately, as this is a

poisonous mushroom. A note must be added for the forager: Regardless of the edibility of the mushroom, they should not be destroyed nor trampled, as these ruins the ecosystem in which the mushroom thrives. The color of the flesh of the mushroom is another indicator with which to properly identify a mushroom. The mushroom should not only be examined as a whole, but the forager should make the extra effort to split it lengthwise to examine the color of the flesh of the mushroom. Some stems are hollow, while some change color once they are exposed to air. Take note of these characteristics as these would help identify the type of mushroom that was obtained.

Spore Prints are not necessarily a part per se, but the imprint of the mushroom, obtained to identify if a mushroom is an edible specie or not. This is relatively easy to do, and one should obtain a sheet of black paper and white paper each. Take a mature body of a mushroom and lay it on a sheet of black or white paper on the top of a container, that air may circulate around the mushroom. If one is unsure as to what color the spores may be, arrange the mushroom in such a way that half of the cap lies on the black, while the other half is on the white sheet. Overlay the sheets, as needed. Leave the mushroom for three days in a warm place to allow it to shed the spores it bears, and it creates a visible spore print.

1.4 Conclusion

The mushroom is a food item that one can either love or hate, in accordance with cultural norms. It remains to be a popular food source that can be used to augment the food supplies that one has. The identification process is never easy, and it requires the need to arm oneself with the knowledge needed to ensure that the mushroom picker is able to pick a species known to be edible, rather than one that is fatal. The chapter does discuss the mushroom and its parts, however, the more detailed intricacies of the identification of the species will be elaborated on in the next chapter, as this requires a lengthy discussion on what characteristics should be identified in each part of the mushroom that one was able to pick or forage for. While one can simply opt to go for the mushrooms in the supermarket, there is a certain thrill in the knowledge that one can obtain the mushrooms for free if properly identified.

2 THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE MUSHROOMS

One does not need to be a mycologist or a veteran forager to know that mushrooms and fungi indeed come in all shapes and sizes, and the knowledge of the terminologies that are used in this book to describe the appearance of the fungus in question would greatly aid in the identification of species that are edible or poisonous, given that some mushrooms bear similar appearances to other species that may otherwise be inedible or downright deadly. Each part in this section will be organized in accordance with the part of the mushroom, followed by the terms and the descriptions that are applicable to these terms. We start first, with the most visible part of the mushroom, the cap. When one gleans the look of the cap, there is the need to pay attention to the color, the shape, the texture, and the appearance of the surface of the cap. The applicable terms are as follows:

Term	Detail	Description
Convex	Shape	The shape of the mushroom cap is rounded or dome-like.
Conical	Shape	The shape of the mushroom cap tapers upwards to a central point.
Funnel-Shaped	Shape	The cap of the mushroom possesses a depression in the center, much like a kitchen funnel would appear.
Folded	Shape	The cap or the visible part of the mushroom resembles the folds of a brain, or that of a honeycomb.
Umbonate	Shape	The mushroom cap resembles that of an umbrella, with a flat surface that has a raised center.
Loose	Scales	The veil scales of the mushroom are loose in appearance, that is to say, they have wider spaces between them.
Scaly	Scales	The surface of the mushroom cap resembles scales in appearance. These are part of the skin of the mushroom cap.

Term	Detail	Description
Translucently Striate	Appearance	It is possible for the forager to see the gills of the mushroom through the cap with the naked eye.
Striate	Appearance	The mushroom cap contains light grooves on the surface.
Concentric Zone	Appearance	The cap of the mushroom appears to grow and expand from a central point in the cap. There will be visible marks to indicate the concentric nature of the cap.
Shaggy	Appearance	The cap of the mushroom contains long, fibrous scales that make it resemble hair.
Inrolled Margin	Appearance	The margins of the mushroom cap are turned inwards. A mushroom that one can use as a reference for this description is the shiitake mushroom.
Sticky	Texture	The surface of the mushroom cap is moist and gelatinous with an adherent quality.

The stem is another part of the mushroom that should be accorded significant attention. The forager would have to take note of the presence or absence thereof of a ring, a veil, and a volva. The presence of either would indicate that the mushroom is poisonous and should not be touched or dealt with at all. One should not only pay attention to the surface but take the time to carefully incise and split the mushroom stem lengthwise, to determine the quality of the interior of the mushroom as these are critical characteristics in their identification.

Term	Detail	Description
Rooting	Appearance	The stem of the mushroom has its base embedded into the soil.
Clavate	Appearance	The mushroom stem terminates in a swollen, clubbed shape.
Tapered to	Appearance	The stem of the mushroom tapers to a central point, similar to an upside-down arrowhead.

Base		
Stem and Ring	Appearance	Both are present, the ring is the remnant of the partial veil of the mushroom. These should be treated cautiously as these are inedible.

The Gills of the Mushroom are located on the underside of the cap, but some mushroom species may not have visible gills. These are usually limited to the fruiting bodies that have caps or are brackets where the tissues that produce the spores are located on the underside of the fruiting body. These may be arranged either as tubes, spines, gills, or smoothly. The tube layer will resemble the pores of the skin and would need closer examination. The Gills are deceptive as from an upwards perspective, the mushroom would seem to have gills, where closer examination would show that there are spines or tubes instead. The examination of gilled fungi should start from the junction where the cap meets the stem.

Term	Detail	Description
Equal	Appearance	All the gills are the same length, from the point where the cap meets the stem.
Varying	Appearance	The gills all have different or inconsistent lengths.
Forked	Appearance	The gills tend to split into two the closer they are to the margin of the mushroom cap.
Crowded	Width	The gills are tightly or densely packed. Think of the underside of a shiitake mushroom.
Widely Spaced	Width	The gills of the mushroom are spaced far apart from each other, with visible gaps in between each gill.
Joined to Collar	Width	There is a visible collar at the junction where the stem attaches to the cap. The gills radiate from this gap and are short in length.
Radiating	Appearance	The gills spread out from the margins of the mushroom cap.

Term	Detail	Description
Spines	Appearance	The spines, as named, occupy the underside of the mushroom cap.
Pores	Appearance	The tube-like structures are in place instead of gills, and are visible as pore-like structures on the underside of the mushroom cap.
Maze-Like Pores	Appearance	The pores tend to branch out into structures called hymenium.
Free	Attachment	The cap is not joined to the stem.
Notched	Attachment	The cap is indented where it attaches to the mushroom stem.
Decurrent	Attachment	The cap runs partly down the length of the stem.
Sinuate Notched	Attachment	The cap of the mushroom has a curve and is indented as it goes towards the stem.
Adnate	Attachment	The cap of the mushroom has a broad attachment to the stem.
Adnexed	Attachment	The cap of the mushroom has a narrow attachment to the stem.

Spore Prints were discussed in the previous chapter but will be done in more detail in this section. The color of the spore's aid in the identification of the mushroom and foragers should take note of the color of the spores of edible species and keep a record so as to ensure that mushrooms that are picked are sure to be edible. It is important though that mushrooms used to obtain the spore print must be fresh, dried mushrooms do not release any spores.

To take a spore print:

1. Use a sharp knife to carefully excise the cap from the stem of the mushroom.
2. Lay the cap on a sheet of black paper overlaid over white paper. The halves of each cap should lay on both colors of paper. This is

to ensure that the spores would be captured, whether they are dark colored or light colored.
3. Best results may be obtained if the cap and paper are placed under a glass container or dome.
4. Before the forager covers the dome with the glass container, the cap should have a drop of water on top.
5. Leave the cap for several hours or overnight. The longer the cap is left, the quality of the spore print becomes better, as it is thicker.
6. Inspection of the paper will show that the spore print will resemble the gills on the underside of the cap.
7. Observe the color of the spore print. These can range in several color types such as Pinkish to Red: Ochre to Clay colored Spores, A Rust coloration, Purplish-Brown Spores, Black, or White to a Cream-colored spore print. The False Parasol, however, produces green spore prints and should be watched out for. There is little color variation between the spore colors of mushrooms from the same genus.

The Fruit Body, summarily, the body of the mushroom aids in the identification of the mushroom, through the dimensions or the measurement of the mushrooms. There are variations however, with each mushroom as one would have to take into consideration the presence of environmental factors, and the environment where the mushroom has grown. The mushrooms that are grilled or bracket-shaped may be easily measured with the aid of a tape measure. Otherwise, the measurement of the cap, stem and gills would be necessary to help identify the mushroom properly.

1. If the base is club-shaped, the width of the base must be measured.
2. Measure the width of the stem from the point where it is at its thickest.
3. Measure the length of the stem from the point where it attaches to the ground to the gills of the mushroom cap.
4. Measure the length or the diameter of the cap.

The measurements of the mushrooms in this book are in accordance with what is typical for that species, and one should consider the

variations of the sizes. Some species may grow quite large, while some are positively minuscule.

2.1 Conclusion

The identification of the mushroom is reliant on how much detail one can obtain from the mushroom itself. While tedious, it is a necessary part of the identification process to safely differentiate the edible from the non-edible species of mushrooms that one can find in their locale. That said, once the person gets the knack of mushroom identification, the process would come in second nature to ensure that all foraged mushrooms are safe to eat. It is best to take the time to positively identify edible species rather than potentially suffer from the fatal effects of a poisoned mushroom. Now that the identification process has been outlined, the next section deals with how to locate the mushrooms in North America.

3 FIND FANTASTIC FUNGI

Mushrooms tend to thrive in the moist areas of a climactic zone, and one would often picture the traditional image of a mushroom, nestled in the moist, fallen leaves or in the roots of a tree. It is important to note however, that some mushroom species are what are termed, mycorrhizal- wherein some species tend to develop or thrive within certain trees, and so, if the forager can identify the tree, chances are they would be able to find the mushroom or its fruiting body somewhere within the vicinity of the said tree. Oak trees for instance, are an ideal location where the White or Black Truffle may be located, often at the base, or around the diameter of the oak tree. Aside from the species of tree, another factor that one has to consider with the identification of the mushroom species is the material that the mushroom grows in. The soil, or the material in which they thrive may have certain levels of moisture that some mushrooms prefer, and some areas in the woodlands may have a certain amount of light that falls upon the area, which affects mushroom growth, despite the fact that the mushroom has no chlorophyll that utilizes the light. The area or levels wherein a mushroom might thrive would have to be precise, any deviation that is higher or lower would lead to a futile search, whereas if one adheres to the provided for ranges, then one would have a bounty of mushrooms to pick from. In the interests of conservation and generosity however, it would be best to pick only what is needed to leave some for other foragers and other animals who may want to pick part of the mushroom as well. They tend to grow in clusters, and so, where one fungus might grow, the forager may find other species as well. It is up to the forager and their skill to identify as to whether or not these species may be consumed at all. That said, while one can know the lay of the land as much as they would like, mushrooms are not the type of plant that one would call predictable. They come into existence over the span of a few hours or days, and wither away once they have dispersed their spores, and thus, the discovery of fresh mushrooms in the forests would be heavily dependent on the luck of the person, something one can only hope to have plenty of.

Take note that while one can forage for mushrooms, there is the necessary element of permission to obtain from the requisite

authorities and/or landowners to prevent any occurrence of criminal charges for trespassing. If the mushroom is on private property after all, by rights it belongs to the landowner. Likewise, if the mushroom is found in parklands, one would have to obtain permission from the government authorities concerned.

3.1 Mushrooms in the United States

The United States is not a place that one would normally associate with wild, foraged mushrooms, but this is in contrast to the abundance of mushrooms that are present in Continental Europe and East Asia. Most Americans are familiar with the cultivated mushroom, the ubiquitous button mushrooms that fortify soups, and add body to a variety of sauces, soups and are excellent side dishes. This is to expand the cultivated mushroom to include the brown button mushroom, the cremini mushrooms and the portobellos, with their large, brown caps. While there are other varieties of mushrooms that may be encountered in the country, it is noted that these mushrooms are often found in high-end grocery stores and markets, and this would often mean that the foraged mushrooms are quite pricey. If one does need the mushrooms however and would like to avoid all the necessary effort to locate, identify and harvest them, the mushrooms in the markets would be well worth the price, and peace of mind, to ensure that the mushroom chosen is indeed the edible species. The forager who is more accustomed to the harvest of these wild mushrooms, however, would have a more economical means to ensure a steady supply of the delicacies with their own efforts, without the need to go to these markets, save to augment a meager forage.

There are several mushrooms that may be found in the upscale markets of the United States, such as the Morels (a species of *Morchella*) familiar in sight due to the honeycomb cap that gives it a distinct appearance. The book has mentioned in this section of the brown button, cremini and portobello mushrooms, hence one can gloss over these three. Porcinis, chanterelles, hedgehog mushrooms, oyster mushrooms, blue foot mushrooms, enoki mushrooms, shiitake mushrooms, and beech mushrooms may be found. Truffles, both black and white species, may also be found in the fall and winter months. Some mushrooms that grow in clusters, such as the maitake or the hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, cauliflower mushrooms and the chicken mushrooms may be found sold at farmer's markets. A more visually impactful set of mushrooms includes the purple blewits, the red-orange lobster mushroom, and the indigo-blue chanterelle.

3.2 Mexico

The markets of Mexico carry several types of mushrooms or fungi at the very least. One of the more familiar forms is the delicacy known as *huitlacoche*, a corn smut found on diseased corn that often fetches a higher price than the crop on which it grows on. It forms the basis of fillings that can be used to stuff pastry doughs for empanadas. Caesar's mushrooms and blushers are often sold alongside zucchini blossoms in the market stalls. One would also find the presence of boletus mushrooms, coral fungi, orange milk and indigo blue milk caps, and even the lobster mushroom, a favored gourmet delicacy that has made its way towards the markets of the United States. Each market stall has a plethora of forest treasures that one can use in a variety of dishes or adapt to a particular dish if one so chooses.

3.3 Where to Find the Mushrooms

The location of a mushroom or two would entail the exploration of various types of terrain, both rural and urban. It is important that one utilizes the senses to help locate the mushroom, as some may be located up a tree, or it is possible that one can be scented as some species of fungi emanate specific scents. There are common locations in which fungi may be found, and the subsequent sections will detail where one can look for them.

3.4 Lawns

The temperate zones of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres lead to lawns as a main source of mushrooms. Regardless of how well kept a lawn is, the fungi that grow beneath the soil are quite resilient and will cause the occasional mushroom to spring up when the right conditions coincide, often the concurrence of rainfall and mild weather, and one would see the mushroom caps as they unfurl into the sky. The variances in seasons in lawns, however, mean that there are a variety of species that one can potentially find on a lawn, so one would find a different set of mushrooms in the spring, fall and summer. There are those species that thrive in a particular lawn, and one would have to keep a close eye on what species may be available in their respective lawns. It is also noted that if the mushroom grows on the property of another landowner, that permission is first obtained. Chances are that the landowner would be more than happy to permit the harvest of the mushroom to ensure that their lawn remains pristine. In the springtime, one would be able to find the lawn mower's mushroom (*Panaeolina foeniscii*) as it tends to appear in lawns and meadows, or at least any area that is grassy. There may be some difficulties in its location as it may be obscured by the presence of white clover, however, in a lawn that is known for its greenery, then, the visibility of the cap of the mushroom in question would be highlighted. If the lawns are fertilized with manure, then there are chances that the manure itself would be impregnated with spores, and one can expect that other varieties of mushrooms to make their appearance if the lawn is fertilized in this manner. Small Inky Caps, Panaeolus, and the Magic mushrooms are among those that spread in this manner though all three mentioned are inedible. The warmth of summer would cause the first growth of the Dunce's Cap, a mushroom that has a conical white cap with reddish-brown gills that readily wilt under the noontime sun. The shield agrocybe is another mushroom that has small, yellow, circular caps with brown gills that may be found alongside the Dunce's Cap. The aforementioned mushrooms in this section are all inedible and should not be foraged for. Removed perhaps would be a more viable option. If one searches for an edible mushroom that grows on a lawn though, that would be the Shaggy Mane (*Coprinus comatus*)

distinguished with the presence of a tall, cylindrical, scaly, white cap with gills that change color to a really dark black and its gradual dissolution once it reaches maturity is one sight familiar to those with lawns in the temperate climactic zone. The forager would find it twice a year, in the spring and fall months, where it grows in such abundance in the fall months. The summer months in lawns would often yield the presence of the fairy ring mushroom (*Marasmius oreades*), an edible species that grows in a ring on a lawn. The rings become visible as circles and arcs that are of a darker shade of green than the grass around it. It is on these arcs and circles that the forager can expect to find the fairy ring mushroom. The diameter of these arcs and circles expands yearly, and one can expect to have a wider area in which to forage for these mushrooms. There are instances where the circles may overlap, which can lead to a plethora of mushrooms. However, the cautions forager should keep an eye out for other species known to reproduce and expand in the same manner, as some, especially the Sweating Mushroom (*Clitocybe dealbata*) closely resembles the Fairy Ring Mushroom and may grow alongside it in the circles that intersect.

The pink bottom mushroom (*Agaricus campestris)* is another edible mushroom that grows in a similar pattern and is considered as an edible species as it is related to the cultivated mushroom varieties that one would be familiar with. The white cap, short stalk and pink gills that turn a rich brown as it matures are the characteristics that define this particular mushroom. The transition period from late summer to autumn yields an abundance of mushrooms, both edible and deadly. The puffball is a recognizable sight, as the real puffballs possess a hole from which the spores are ejected, or “puffed” to help it spread in other areas. It is an edible species best eaten when the puffball is still white and closed. When split in half, the interior is white without any marks or discolorations. This helps the forager distinguish it from several other similar species wherein there is an outline of a mushroom once the body has been split in half (The Destroying Angel- *Amanita virosa*), a blackish interior (The False Puffball – *Scleroderma citrinum*), layered green or red hues (Stinkhorn Eggs). The Giant Puffball, however, cannot be mistaken for any other species due to its immense size, about the size of a soccer ball. It is best when it is firm and white all over when split in

half, that it is possible to serve it to a group of people with enough of the single mushroom for seconds.

The green-spored lepiota (*Chlorophyllum molybdites*) is a poisonous species that makes an appearance in this transition period from summer to fall. It resembles the Parasol and Shaggy Parasol mushrooms (*Macrolepiota procera or M. rachodes*) or the Agaricus mushroom as it has a white, slightly scaly mushroom cap, a straight stalk with a ring around it, and white gills that are present while the body is immature. Once it matures however, the gills turn a mix of grayish-green and yield a green spore print. The large size of its cap makes it a distinctive sight in lawns, and one could encounter growths of this species in fairy rings as well. While some consider it to be edible once cooked, it tends to cause an upset stomach, a discomfort that is best avoided whenever possible. The Horse mushroom (*Agaricus arvensis*) is the best mushroom that can be found in this period, with its large white caps, brown gills, and a stalk with a ring on it. The species may also be found in fairy rings, and the gills exude a scent reminiscent of almonds or aniseed. This is a distinct characteristic that aids in its identification as the other species do not exude the same scent, or do not have the scent of iodine. In addition, the poisonous species are bright yellow once cut at the base of the fruiting body.

3.5 Backyards

The backyard potentially has an abundance of spots where fungi may thrive, as there are trees and shrubs on which the spores may possibly grow in, and the presence of mulch around these trees and shrubs on the premise to retard weed growth aids in the proliferation of the mushrooms in this type of environment, regardless of whether or not it has been groomed or trimmed. The presence of wood in various stages of decomposition makes for an excellent material that can be impregnated by fungal spores and allows them to provide a suitable environment for several types of mushrooms to grow in. The base of the tree trunks often yields early growths such as the inky cap mushrooms (*Coprinus micaceus*), a densely packed mass of conical, light brown caps that often dissolve into an inky substance. The oyster mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*), a widely known and cultivated edible species, may also thrive in the backyards. This species of mushroom is a hardy and resilient species that can potentially fruit every month, in the right conditions, and as early as January. It can grow on trees, shrubs, logs, and stumps and is the same mushroom that can be encountered in the markets. Choose the fresh, firm versions and the forager would be delighted at the free supply of mushrooms in their own backyard. Wood chip mulch is another substrate that provides a sufficient home for several species of mushrooms to thrive in. Among these, the forager may encounter the spring *Agrocybe* (*Agrocybe dura* complex), the delicate *Psathyrella candolleana* and the wine cap (*Stropharia rugoso-annulata*), an edible species greatly favored in France, once gathered while still young, and the caps have barely opened. The wine cap has its name due to the burgundy red to pale tan coloration of the caps, often cracked in appearance, with grayish-purple gills on the underside, and a gear-like ring on the thick stalks. On a good day, one can harvest approximately 30 pounds on a cool, moist, spring day. The stinkhorn (*Phallus rubicandus*) is a species that one can smell before it is seen, given the rather descriptive name. It has an orange to red cap shaped somewhat like a phallus (the reader, if unfamiliar with this term would want to search a dictionary as a mention of the part it looks like may elicit censorship), is rather common in places where wood chip mulch is used to care for the

yards. Its coloration makes it a vividly picturesque contrast with the muted dark colors of the substrate it grows in. The transition of spring to autumn yields a difference in the mushrooms that usually thrive in this type of material as one can expect the appearance of the Magic Mushrooms, defined by the blue-stained caps that often proliferate in this type of substrate in the autumn months. The fall months, however, also herald the potential appearance of a more poisonous variety of mushroom, the galerina, where it prefers to thrive on logs in various stages of decay. In more mountainous regions however, the galerina makes its appearance in the summer rather than the autumn. When it appears, however, as a small, brown mushroom, it should never be eaten as it can result in gastrointestinal upsets and rather weak bowels. The hardwoods of the backywards often yield choice morsels of edible mushrooms such as the Chicken Mushroom, (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) and the White Chicken Mushroom (*Laetiporus cincinnatus*) often found at the base of the hardwood trees. Oak trees are the favored haunt of the Maitake Mushrooms, familiarly known as the Hen of the Woods Mushrooms (*Grifola frondosa*) where they may be harvested annually, and foragers who search around oak trees for these three choice fungi may easily find them in most forests with hardwood trees. The mushrooms grow to such immense sizes that it is possible that one may have an excess of mushrooms that are often best preserved frozen, dried for use in stocks and soups, or pickled the caps. Conversely, the jack o' lantern mushroom may be found in the same environs in the summer and fall months and is often the attributable cause for most instances of mushroom poisoning due to its similarity to the chanterelle. This mistake in turn may be attributed to its distinct orange coloration, its propensity to cluster around the bases of trees, grasses and on wood, leading people to collect it, though they may be unsure as to which species they hold in their hands. Consumption of this mushroom may cause gastrointestinal symptoms of such intensity that those who consume it would not want to see nor eat any type of mushroom. The honey mushroom is one that has been highly disfavored by those who care for trees, as its presence on the base of trees means that a lot of people who know of the honey mushroom and its edibility often travel to trees with proliferative growths of the fungus, and harvest them, which in turn, damages the tree that the mushroom is found

on. This would not be an issue normally, except that the fungus tends to grow plentifully among trees everywhere, regardless of distance. Most utilize it for pasta sauces, mushroom ketchups, and winter food, though there is caution that must be taken as botulism may occur if the mushroom has been improperly canned. The aforementioned galerina bears some similarity to the honey mushroom and should be carefully distinguished to ensure that no mushroom poisoning occurs. The galerina is smaller and brown in color and prefers to grow on decayed logs rather than live trees. It also prefers to grow alone rather than in clusters, and yields brown spore prints rather than white. The big laughing gym (*Gymnopilus spectabilis*) bears some similarity to the favored honey mushroom, though one cannot consume it simply due to its bitterness. It is mistaken for the honey mushroom as it too, grows in clusters, is quite large as its name implies, has yellow to orange colorations, with an orange to orange-brown ring on the stalk, with orange gills that produce an orange spore print. The consumption of the mushroom will yield psychedelic results that may not be apparent within the first thirty minutes but will lead you into uncontrollable bouts of intermittent laughter in the space of two to three hours. That aside, it is possible to find other types of mushrooms in the hardwoods such as the Shaggy Mane (*Coprinus comatus*); the Pink Bottom Mushroom (*Agaricus campestris*) and the White Dunce Cap (*Conocybe lactea*).

3.6 Parks

With the abundance of parklands in North America, they become a prime place for which a forager may be able to safely forage for mushrooms provided that they have obtained the necessary permissions and are aware of the particular laws that govern the selection and harvest of mushrooms in their respective parks. The legalities are such that one improperly performed harvest may result in a hefty fine, or potential imprisonment. A rule of thumb is that one cannot forage for mushrooms in national parks, due to an existent no-pick policy that has not undergone any amendment. Public Parks may be more permissive, but again, it would be best to confer with local authorities prior to the act to ensure that one does not get slapped with a fine or a jail sentence. Permission is also needed from private landowners to ensure that one does not get charged for trespassing. These are the legalities that one should be aware of, not only in parks but anywhere that is covered by some form of authority, national, federal, or local. Once this has been obtained, however, life becomes way easier for the forager to be able to harvest the mushrooms that they so desire.

The local parklands are an underrated source of mushrooms, due to their proximity to urbanized areas. Despite this, the presence of trees and the items used to maintain the trees such as wood chip mulch, and possibly the presence of fallen leaves all coincide in an environment that is highly favorable to the growth of fungi. The greatest advantage in the parks is that one does not have to be a highly skilled mountaineer, or a skilled hiker to be able to forage in the parks. As it is, the paved paths, and walkways provide ample opportunities for parkgoers and foragers to locate mushrooms that may be safely foraged for once all requirements have been met. Another advantage is that in the more urbane parklands, one does not have to contend with other wildlife. Therefore, one does not have to worry about bears, reptiles of any form, wildcats of any size, and the terrain that would ordinarily cause one to slip and slide about.

The trees in the parklands are often similar to the woodlands, and those in the backyards, and therefore, it becomes possible to locate and identify mushrooms that are just as edible as those found in the

wild, with significantly lesser risk on one's person. One would have to be aware of the mycorrhizal mushrooms that grow in a symbiotic relationship with certain trees, and for that, one has to be aware what certain trees look like to take advantage of edible mushrooms that possess such a relationship with certain trees. That said, it is imperative that one have sufficient knowledge, or at least forage under the guidance of a more experienced mushroom hunter.

3.7 Climactic Zones

Mushrooms come in several types of climates in North America, and one would have to have an awareness of the specific climate type in their locale to be assured of which mushrooms to be on the lookout for. Climate is one of the more crucial factors in the determination of where a mushroom may be found, and as such, one would have to devote their fair share of attention to interpret the nuances of the local climate to take advantage of a bountiful harvest of mushrooms in the woods.

3.7.1 Mixed Hardwood Forests

The hardwood forests are populated by hemlocks and other hardwood trees that provide ample shade for an entire ecosystem beneath the canopies of their branches. Beneath the outstretched leaves, comes sunlight, that dapples the vivid green of the forest floor, where mossy surfaces and dark green leaves abound. The mushroom forager would scent a plethora of possibilities as this environment is conducive to a variety of edibles such as the delicate chanterelle mushroom, the hedgehog mushrooms and the red waxy caps that are beautifully set among the mossy surfaces of the forest. One would also find numerous species of edible boletes, to include the highly favored porcini mushroom, staple of so many Italian mushroom-based dishes. Fish Milk Caps and other milk caps may also be found in this type of biome. Conversely, along with the edible mushrooms, one may also find the presence of the more dangerous *Amanita* classification of mushrooms – which are all poisonous; *Cortinarius* – known more for its aesthetic appeal rather than beauty, and other russulas, gilled mushrooms and brittle caps.

3.7.2 Deciduous Fall Forests

Once the trees begin to shed their leaves, would the forager begin to walk through the forest to search for their choice morsels of the mushrooms. Oak trees for one tend to yield the hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, and as these mushrooms tend to grow in large clusters, and in the assumption that one is able to locate a sufficient number of clusters of these mushrooms around the bases of oak trees, then

the main concern of the forager would be on how to safely transport these mushrooms out of the forest. That aside, the white bear's head tooth fungus is conspicuous enough to be spotted by even the most novice of foragers. However, the main dilemma is how to safely obtain it, due to its preference for slightly higher elevations. This is often remedied with the aid of a partner, who would be there to catch it or prod it with a stick, while the forager engages in the other role. One has to prod, and one has to catch. Birch trees often have clusters of the chaga mushroom, which often resemble a burned piece of charcoal attached to the tree. While not necessarily an edible meant for the epicurean forager, it finds its utility in a variety of medicinal applications of which it is a highly favored species among herbalists.

3.7.3 Spruce and Aspen Forests

A forager who walks in the canopied forest floors shaded by the spruce and aspen would find an abundance of mushrooms that would normally be available in other places. There is one catch however, as other places would have a longer period in which the mushroom begins to fruit, those that are found in the Spruce and Aspen forests have a comparatively shorter period in which they may be gathered. The period is quite short, and often presents a dilemma to the forager as to what they should pick, from the sheer abundance of the mushrooms that are present in the particular locale. Giant Coral Mushrooms and Hawk's Wings may fill up several baskets' worth of mushrooms, while the King Boletes, due to their immense weight per piece, may also occupy significantly large amounts of baskets. Chanterelles, for one, remain the same size, however what they lack in size are compensated by the vast numbers that may be found on the forest floors, that the forager too, may encounter some difficulty in the transport of large amounts of mushrooms to their vehicles. The summer months of these forests often yield the presence of the brown and the white Matsutake Mushrooms, which prefer to thrive in the mountain biomes. The forager may take advantage of the season to search for the Shrimp Russula, a species of mushroom whose flavor profile makes it an indispensable substitute for shrimp in pasta dishes that involve seafood. The Coral Club mushroom is one of the more remarkable edible mushrooms that may be found in this type of environment where it favors Spruce

trees, and the forager who is keen on mushrooms would want to leave room to spare for its harvest, as its flavor is greatly complementary to the other mushrooms that have been mentioned in this section. The forager would need to greatly acclimate themselves to the altitude at which these mushrooms thrive, but the payoff is worth the effort as the baskets would be abundantly laden with the mushrooms that it is possible to actually plan a dinner of several courses around the mushrooms that have been successfully foraged for.

3.7.4 Coniferous Forests

Conifers are those trees that produce seeds enclosed in cones, and one would be familiar with pine trees as a representative species, though there are other conifers that populate the forests of North America. The forager will not come away with an empty basket if they forage in the fall season in this type of forest as one would find a variety of edibles, such as Chanterelles, Hedgehog Mushrooms, Bear Heads, and the Matsutake mushrooms. These in turn come in several varieties, as though one may be more accustomed to the vivid coloration of the Chanterelle caps, there are also rainbow and white varieties, whereas the king boletes also make an appearance. One would have to contend with other foragers who desire the Matsutake, which from its Japanese connotation, is a highly prized mushroom in Japan, and is sought for by many.

3.7.5 Warm Winter Climates

This may be a bit of a paradox, as the descriptors seem to connote two different temperatures, thus one would have to understand that this is the type of winter where there is still some form of warmth experienced despite the apparent presence of snowfall. The concurrence of moisture and warmth leads to conditions that are conducive to the growth of various mushrooms. Chanterelles are a staple in this type of weather, and foragers freely gather them in copious abundance. Oak and maple trees provide a sufficient area where foragers may find the Candy Cap mushroom, named for the scent that is evocative of maple syrup, and which lends itself well to pastries, and other savory dishes.

3.8 Conclusion

Mushrooms may be found in a variety of places in the forests, and they are highly seasonal and subject to the vagaries of weather that may cause them to have a long fruiting season, or a period in which one must hasten to harvest them due to their short lives. It becomes necessary for the forager to familiarize themselves with the locales where mushrooms are able to thrive and be aware of the distinctions between various types of fungi that may potentially grow together, though they may be a mix of poisonous and edible. The mushroom may be found in locales that are just as urbanized, in contrast to their wild environments, and though that may be the case, it becomes necessary to ensure that all legalities have been taken care of before one embarks on the hunt for the mushrooms. The next chapter of this book deals with the preparations that one must undertake prior to their search for mushrooms in any environment.

4 HOW TO BE A FUNGI FORAGER

The search for mushrooms is not as easy as one would expect, given the length and detail of these chapters, but suffice it to say that one should always be prepared, for not only the harvest of the mushrooms, but also for the possibility that the mushrooms foraged for may not necessarily be what they are, which is to say, they might be the more poisonous variety. There is the need then, for a lot of preparation that needs to be undertaken in the form of equipment, to ensure that not only is the forager well protected from the elements that surround them, but also from the trees and shrubs on which one may possibly find the mushroom of choice.

4.1 Equipment

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it will detail the basics of what one would need in the search for mushrooms.

- Baskets are a recommended receptacle in which one would safely collect mushrooms. Those with covers are highly recommended to ensure that mushrooms do not spill out in the event that one trips over a tree root or branch or slips on the moist leaves that have fallen. The basket should have a broad bottom to ensure that one would be able to collect as many mushrooms as they would want.
- Wax Paper or Brown Paper Bags are recommended to ensure that the collected mushrooms are properly stored and separated from one another to ensure that they may be easily identified once at home. It also helps prevent damage in the event that the mushrooms fall, or if the forager falls and the mushrooms spill out. Once home, the separation of the mushrooms ensures that there are no poisonous mushrooms that get mixed in with edible species once at home.
- Field Guides are a handy guide to ensure that the mushrooms that are found may be easily identified as they would list down the respective characteristics that would aid one in the identification of the mushroom. Field guides should contain details on the mushrooms that make them distinct and should also contain information on similar species that are poisonous to enable the distinction. Photos of the mushrooms should be present.
- Knives such as Swiss army or folding, is recommended. Prior to this, however, it is recommended that one research or ask about any potential ordinances or laws with regards to the presence of knives in one's person. With the rise in knife-related crimes, one would need to be judicious in the carriage of knives, so it would be best to forestall any concerns with local authorities and simply ask about the knives and if one can use them. If permitted, use only those two recommended types. A kitchen knife is not recommended for the harvest of mushrooms. The knife is not there to slice the mushroom off the stalk, oddly

enough. It is there to enable one to dig around the mushroom that it may be harvested in its entirety. This step is necessary as some mushrooms may contain growths underground that help aid in its identification. The dig does not affect the quality of mushroom growth, so one should not worry about that. Once the mushroom has been properly identified, the knife may be used to excise the stem from the base of the mushroom to ensure that the clean mushrooms do not get contaminated with the soil from other mushrooms.

- Magnifying Glasses or Hand Lenses would aid in the identification of the finer characteristics of the mushroom, particularly in the underside of the caps, where the identification of the gills is necessary. The recommended magnifications are 5x to 10x, enough to provide the details needed to help properly identify the features of the mushroom that was chosen.
- Cameras, preferably a lightweight version that is easy enough to carry. This is a matter of preference however, as more modern foragers may probably utilize their smartphones. In this instance, however, a more crucial factor here would be the resolution and storage of the images. The forager will need the camera for instances to record the location and where the mushroom was successfully foraged for. The picture will also help one recall what color the mushroom was when it was first pictured and harvested, as the caps may change color once transported home. The accurate identification of the proper cap color will help the forager better properly identify the mushroom that they have harvested. In line with this, the next item will come in handy.
- Notecards and a Pen- while a pencil will do in a jiffy, they can be erased, though it is strictly a matter of personal preference, the point is one would be able to readily record details. When one locates a mushroom, the notecard becomes a medium by which one would be able to record where the mushroom has grown, whether on or beneath a medium; if it grows singly or in clusters, the color of the cap of the mushroom as it is found, and once it gets home; as well as other distinct features such as the presence of any rings on the stalk, or any scent that it exudes. Be sure to add the note card onto the paper bag or the waxed paper

that contains the specific mushroom to ensure that there is no confusion whatsoever. Aside from this, it becomes possible to use the card as a means to obtain the spore prints from mushrooms that are encountered in the woodlands. To do this, place the cap on the card and use the waxed paper to secure the cap to the card. Once enough time has passed, it is possible to obtain the spore print from the card once the mushrooms have been transported home.

- Brushes, preferably a light one. Small paintbrushes or even a shaving brush would generate sufficient friction to brush away any dirt and leaves and other various detritus that may adhere to the mushroom. Stiff-bristled brushes are not ideal as these may potentially mark the mushroom and obscure pertinent features that are essential to its proper identification.
- Sticks, at least 5 feet in length, are an underrated piece of equipment that one would need to successfully forage in the forest, as they function as assistive devices that would help a person hike and climb up slippery or hilly terrain. It also functions as a tool to push aside leaves and vines that may potentially cover mushrooms on the forest floor.

4.2 On the Forager

The forager themselves would require their own preparations on their person as the search for mushrooms may necessitate the need to embark into woodlands and forests in which other people may rarely venture, or if they do, the forager may be mistaken for a woodland creature. One also has to contend with predators such as bears and wildcats that live in the wooded regions of North America, and potentially other hunters who may hunt wild game. There are also the insects that one has to consider, and thus the forager should not forget to prepare their person in the hunt for mushrooms.

- Hats are necessary to protect the head from the rays of the sun, or even from whatever object that may fall from the trees. In any case, a wide, sturdy hat may also double as a receptacle in which the forager may place other mushrooms, or a single, large mushroom such as the puffball.
- Vests provide necessary insulation and protection for the wearer. However, there are vests with numerous pockets, and those are what the mushroom forager should search for, as the pockets would come in handy to hold pens, pencils, notecards, and miscellaneous other items that the forager may need as they search for mushrooms.
- Long-sleeved shirts provide protection against not only the elements, but also against mosquito bites and from any other insect that may distract the forager from their search for mushrooms.
- Long Pants, these should be of a material that either does not get wet easily, or dries quickly, as mushrooms tend to favor places that are moist or damp in quality. Denim jeans and blue jeans are not recommended attire for foragers as they tend to be quite heavy and are unsuited for hikes. The forested areas may be infested by ticks and other insects that bite, and if this is the case, the hems of the jeans should be tucked into one's socks and a spray repellent should be used on the skin underneath.
- Comfortable shoes are a must, as one would have to do a lot of heavy-duty walks to forage enough mushrooms for their personal needs. These should be non-slip to prevent potential

injuries from slippery or damp ground. It is not advisable to utilize slippers, clogs, or open-toed shoes as these may put the forager in danger and are impractical for use when one forages.

- Additional precautions should be undertaken by the forager in the midst of hunting season, and thus, the long-sleeved shirts should be brightly colored, and the forager should make as much noise as possible – hum, sing, laugh, talk, whistle, to alert anyone nearby that the forager and the source of noise is a person and not an animal. It would be a terrible idea to make animal noises, that would simply aggravate the situation with fatal results. Mushroom hunters that were camouflage colors, dark colors and move stealthily may potentially be mistaken for animals and may accidentally be hunted by others.
- Bottled water to ensure that there is a suitable source of safe hydration for the forager. While there are streams, one cannot be assured of the potability of the water, and it is better to be safe with regards to water sources rather than not, as freshwater streams may contain flukes and various other bacteria that may permanently impair bodily functions if ingested.
- Repellent for Clothes and the Skin. Pants and outerwear may be dusted with powder to repel ticks. It is not ideal to come down with Lyme Disease (a disease spread by the bite of a Tick), simply because one was foolhardy in the protection that was recommended. Search local stores for a suitable compound that one may use to protect one's body and clothes from any ticks or other insect bites.
- Sunscreen – the woodlands may not be the beach, however, the amount of sun that filters through the forest canopy may still create some form of skin damage on the unprepared forager. The sun still shines, and while that happens, the forager is at risk for sun sunburn and skin damage. Sunscreen will improve these and provide additional protection.
- Raincoats and Boots, in preparation for inclement weather. Given the biomes in which one would normally find a plethora of mushrooms, a reasonable assumption can be made that the areas where the mushrooms thrive have their own exposure to significant amounts of precipitation. It would benefit the forager then, to be prepared for this eventuality as the weather may suddenly turn.

- Compasses and Whistles are helpful in case one gets lost. For one, the forager should know how to use a Compass, and be familiar with its orientation to the area. The whistle too should be tested to ensure that it is effective and more importantly, audible across distances.

4.3 The Unspoken Rules

The mushroom hunter may opt to fly solo, but it is up to the forager to do this solo or engage with others from whom one can share and mutually benefit from their collective knowledge of mushrooms. In this instance, if one is with a group, the forager should never deviate from the course set by the group leader. In addition to this, one should always maintain vocal contact, that is to say, one should always be within earshot of other foragers, to ensure that no one gets lost. There are societies wherein similarly minded foragers opt to take advantage of time and season to forage for mushrooms, and this would be beneficial to the forager who wants to know more about how to search for mushrooms. If this feels like too much socialization, it is possible to do this with a few friends or two, to keep one company. The woodlands have the predilection to cause someone to get lost within the forests, especially when the mind is completely absorbed in the search and the identification of the mushroom as an edible species. The whistle would be useful if someone is around to hear it, otherwise, if one is lost with a friend, at least there will be another person to help out and come up with ideas to be free of the woods.

4.4 In Excess of Mushrooms

There are seasons where the forager would find a sufficient abundance of mushrooms, and it is possible that though one has taken care to leave a sufficient number of mushrooms for other foragers and even the local wildlife, one would still have more mushrooms than they know what to do with. Given the short shelf life of the mushrooms, the forager may desire to preserve the mushrooms to ensure that one would be able to enjoy the fruits of their forage, even months after the fruiting season has elapsed. Mushrooms are foremost, still food items, and therefore, are subject to the same variety of culinary preparations that one would normally apply to plant-based produce. While one can theoretically subsist on a mushroom-based diet, it is possible to tire of it eventually. For one, one can hardly eat mushroom soup several times a week and follow it up with sauteed mushrooms. The latter option would be laden with butter to help flavor the mushrooms, and that much dairy would mean that it would also not be ideal for those with hypertension, despite the mushroom being a fungus, rather than meat. The former option may either be a broth or a cream-based soup which are subject to their respective pitfalls as well, and one would eventually tire of those too. Modern culinary preparations have seen mushrooms take center stage when grilled, or fried like tempura, or even smoked on occasion. It is even possible to marinate the mushrooms and roast them as one would a rotisserie chicken and slice the mushrooms to make a reasonably delectable substitute for gyros or shawarmas. However, this would require that the mushrooms be used as fresh as possible, or as close to it, as they can easily wilt, and are not best when stored for long periods in a fresh state. Therefore, one of the best means to ensure that one would enjoy a steady supply of mushrooms over the winter months, would be to preserve them. It is imperative that one cleans the mushroom first before the performance of any culinary preparation. One must remember that mushrooms are very absorbent, and it would be a terrible idea to run them under water. Cut the stem base from the mushroom once it has been harvested to prevent the presence of soil in the gills of the underside of the mushroom cap. The use of a soft-bristled brush is recommended to brush away the detritus that

adheres to the surface and underside of a mushroom cap. If one must run the mushroom under a tap, it is recommended that they be blotted out immediately with a paper towel or a kitchen towel to absorb as much moisture as possible. A good practice would be to split the mushroom lengthwise, as, not only does this help identify certain characteristics in the mushroom, but also helps locate any form of insect damage, or other imperfections that would render it inedible. When one cleans the mushrooms, one should use gloves as some mushrooms contain compounds that can stain the hands of the forager.

Preservation is a good idea to know, and one should at least be familiar with the concept, if they have not done it themselves. There is a certain je ne sais quoi about the mushroom, that makes one compelled to consume the choice morsels in a single serve, however, that would not only be impractical, but be outrageous. It is possible to be sick of mushrooms yes, but not because of mushroom poisoning. One is simply a glutton and has partaken more than their fair share of the foraged bounty. That said, the simplest method one can employ to preserve the mushroom would be to freeze it. However, the forager would have to cook the mushroom first in their desired method prior to its preservation in the deep freeze.

Why is it not possible for the mushroom to be frozen in its raw state?

The mushroom is comprised of ninety percent water, and if it is frozen in its raw state, the water in the mushroom would expand, and if thawed, would destroy the structural integrity of the mushroom body which would make it a pile of mush, which does not appeal to anyone, even the most stalwart mushroom lover. There are numerous methods that one can employ to cook mushrooms, and there are some that bring out the best flavor of the mushroom used, all one has to do at this point, is to exercise their culinary creativity and once cooked, place the cooked product in freezer-safe containers, label them with the date they were cooked, and freeze. Reheat when needed. It is also possible to dry the mushrooms, though one should have ample room for the mushrooms as they could take up a lot of space, particularly if one harvested more than can possibly be used. While the dried mushroom can create a picturesque image, the scent that emanates from the process is not

recommended, not even the slightest whiff. It is a labor-intensive process that takes hours to days to dry out the mushroom, but it compensates the forager with mushrooms that may be used at any time of their own convenience. After all, some of the nicest comestibles take time to produce, mushrooms are no exception. More creative cooks can also opt to pickle the mushroom, though the process tends to polarize some, as some may find the idea unpalatable, while some are intrigued by the possibilities and would try It out. Mushrooms are very absorbent, and would not do well, if left to pickle for a prolonged period of time, it is possible to lose the flavor that makes a mushroom unique, and therefore, negates the effort that went into its selection and harvest. Hen-of-the-Woods mushrooms and Orange Milk-Cap Mushrooms, however, lend themselves well to pickled versions of themselves and would provide a nice contrast to the butter-laden approaches often favored by the cook when mushrooms are the main ingredient.

4.5 Conclusion

The forager does not simply pull up their boots and a basket and prepare to hunt for mushrooms. The forests may be benign yes, but there are so many hidden dangers that the forager should always prepare for, as not only would they have to deal with the forces of nature that may affect the forest ecosystem, but also the very animals that depend on the fungi, or on whose territory the forager may trespass in the search for the mushroom that they desire. In this instance, it is best to be overprepared rather than underprepared given the detail-oriented tasks that the forager intends to undertake, which can potentially cause the mind to be self-absorbed and focused that other details may potentially be forgotten or overlooked, all in the name of the mushroom. It is necessary then, that none of the steps be compromised, nor shortchanged, as this would only result in harder searches for the forager. Once the forager has gotten the knack of mushroom identification, it is possible for the forager to obtain a surplus of mushrooms that can be readily eaten once cooked or preserved to add to the larders and pantries for a later meal. Regardless, the versatility and the knowledge needed to safely harvest the mushroom would be a useful skillset to augment the pantry of the forager. The next section deals with the mushrooms and their respective locations, and how to identify them.

5 MUSHROOMS BY FAMILY (NON-GILLED)

Mushrooms come in all shapes and sizes, and it has been established in this book that there are several varieties that are grouped together in that they share certain characteristics that define them as edible, or otherwise stated. The forager would do well to heed the descriptions provided for to ensure a safe harvest for mushrooms, as this would yield a fruitful bounty if used and identified correctly. Operate on the assumptions of what if, and carefully scrutinize every mushroom to ascertain that these are indeed the edible species and not a similar species that is otherwise deadly. The mushroom then, and the forager who searches for it would need to undergo the processes earlier in its identification to be assured of its safety.

5.1 Morels

For the epicure and the mushroom hunter, the sight of the honeycombed caps of the morel become one of the first indications that presages the arrival of spring, as the morels have the tendency to arrive specifically on the earliest days of the spring. It is possible then, for the mushroom forager and the gourmand, or one person who is both, to head to the nearest woodlands and search for the morel, one of the more well-known edible mushrooms.

Black Morels (*Morchella angusticeps; Morchella conica; Morchella elata)* are the most common species.

Yellow Morels (*Morchella crassipes; Morchella deliciosa; Morchella esculenta)* are the more common varieties.

Common Name: Referred to as Morels, Merkels, Dry Land Fish, and Molly Moochers

Location: The forager may find the morel on the ground, where it grows alone or in clusters with other morel mushrooms.

The Yellow Morel may be found at the base of hardwood trees and in apple orchards.

The Black Morel may be found at the base of ash and sycamore trees, of conifers, and in areas that have been recently burned such as forest fires.

Height: 3 to 6 inches (7.5 to 15 cms) or more when matured.

Cap: Ranges from Cream to Yellow, Light Brown, Brownish-Black, Gray; Conical in shape with a Honeycombed surface, Hollow interior, attached to the stalk of the mushroom at the base of the cap.

Stalk: White, with a hollow interior.

Distinctive Features: The Black Morel has darker ridges than pits on its cap.

Dangerous Lookalikes: False Morels of the genus *Gynomitra*. Morels are hollow when they are split lengthwise, whereas the False Morels are often stuffed, or have divided interiors. The False Morels also have reddish to brownish red caps.

Seasonality: March to May in North America, may last up to June in more mountainous or elevated areas such as the Canadian Rocky Mountains for the Black Morels. Yellow Morels on the other hand maintain the same seasonality but appear two to three weeks after the Black Morels make an appearance, sometimes with an overlap with Morels. Yellow Morels may be found from March to as late as the early weeks of June in the northern regions of North America.

Soil Type: Morels prefer to thrive in alkaline soil, those with a high pH. Heavy Limestone soils of North America make the area conducive for the Morels to thrive. Apple Orchards are a preferred place as the soil is rich in lime, used to fertilize and improve the crops of the Apple Trees.

The forager who wishes to search for the morel should be well advised to do some research, as morels are the type of mushroom wherein sites that they may be foraged in are hotly contested among foragers. Apple orchards are among the more favored sites due to the high alkalinity of the soil, a result of the use of lime to increase the yield of the crop of the apple trees. The forager would do well to search for old or forgotten apple trees as these are the places more likely to yield the Yellow Morel. Black Morels, as stated earlier, prefer ash and sycamore trees, at whose bases the forager may find the morels. Aside from this, the Black Morel has the tendency to thrive in areas that have been burned in a forest fire. It is expected then, with recent news accounts taken into consideration, that the

forests of Southern California, would be prime ground in which a forager could search for the Black Morel.

Distinguished From Species	Difference
Half-free Morel (*Morchella semilibera*)	It appears at the same time as the real morels, though the cap of the Half-Free Morel is not attached by its base to the stalk of the mushroom. It is attached instead, halfway up the cap, which makes Half-Free Morel resemble a skirt. While it is edible and may often times be collected with other edible Morel Species, these are too insubstantial and flavorless, and should be bypassed if one can find sufficient amounts of Yellow Morels.
Verpa (*V. conica*) and (*V. bohemica*)	These may appear at the same time as the morels; however, the caps are only attached to the tip or the narrowest part of the stalk. The ***conica*** has a cap that resembles a thimble in appearance, whereas the ***bohemica*** has a pitted cap. None of them could be potentially mixed up with the morels as their caps are not attached via their bases to the stalks.
False Morels (*Gyromitra spp.*)	May appear at the same time as the yellow and black morels but are distinguished as the false morels have caps that more closely resemble a brain, or are heavily folded, or saddle shaped. They do not have a honeycombed appearance. Once the false morel has been split lengthwise, it does not possess a hollow interior, but instead contains chambers, or is stuffed. The caps are brownish red to red, colors that never appear on a true morel mushroom. While it may be considered edible by some, it should never be eaten by a beginner mushroom hunter.

Species	Difference
False Morel (*Gyromitra esculenta*)	A European variety that may often be collected by mushroom hunters in that locale, is considered to be edible, but must undergo careful preparation in that the mushroom should be boiled first, with the water subsequently discarded afterwards. Do not inhale the vapors that emanate from the pot as this may cause mushroom poisoning. While it may be dried, it would be best to simply avoid this mushroom.

The morel is one of the mushrooms that has been recently cultivated, and one would be able to find them with minimal effort at a gourmet food store. These are readily identifiable due to the uniformity of their appearance. The cultivated version of the morel can be quite expensive, and the flavor pales in comparison to those morels that the forager would be able to find in the wild. A word of caution that should be noted, is that morels should never be eaten raw. Moreover, if one has consumed black morels, restrain or refrain from the intake of alcohol, as the interaction between alcohol and the black morels can result in an upset stomach.

The morel does not hold universal appeal, however, it does well when utilized in cream-based sauces or when sauteed lightly in butter. It is possible to use the morels in a tempura batter, a cream-based soup enhanced by a smidge of grated nutmeg, or as a stuffing. This is dependent upon the creativity of the cook, though admittedly, it is best when simply cooked in a pan with butter or oil and served. One can dry the morels if so wished, as this method intensifies the flavor inherent to the mushroom. While one can air-dry the morel, the method works best with the slightest application of heat. To dry the morel, they need to be split lengthwise, to examine the interior for any insects, and turned several times over two days to ensure that they are evenly dried. Complete the process in an open oven with the lowest possible heat. Leave to dry for an hour, do not let the morels cook. One may also use a food dehydrator if available, where the mushrooms may be dried over the span of a day. Once dried, the morels may be stored in an airtight container, where they may be kept for up to ten years, with no impact on their flavor.

5.2 Truffles

Poetically, the truffles are referred to as the perfumed soul of the earth, where is earthiness is highly evocative of the sensual nature of the truffles once they have been freshly shaved or utilized in the food that they were meant to enhance. Continental Europe is the home of the truffle, where various rodents use it as their food source. It is often searched for with the aid of pigs, whose snouts are able to perceive the complexity of scents that it exudes. Dogs may be able to search for the truffle too, though their claws may potentially damage the soil wherein the truffle grows. The truffles are mushrooms, whose scent is a mix of the earthiness of the land, tinged with the heady scent of garlic, chocolate, and spices. The scent is such that one can actually store truffles in rice, and the rice would be infused with the flavor of the truffle. This is the mushroom preferred by many gourmands and epicures, and it is one that commands a high price, due to the limited supply. Though the truffle is familiar to the European continent, it may also be found in limited areas in North America, where the truffle too, finds great vogue in the enhancement of dishes that it greatly elevates, when freshly shaved over a dish. It is a mushroom that is not used by many, simply due to its rarity and price.

Black Truffles: French Black Truffle (*Tuber melanosporum*)

- Oregon Black Truffle
- (Leucangium carthusianum)
- Burgundy/Summer Truffle (*Tuber aestivum*)
- Chinese Truffle (*Tuber sinensis*)
- Himalayan Truffle (*Tuber himalayensis*)
- Brown Truffle (Leucangium brunneum)

- Oregon Brown Truffle (*Kalapuya brunnea*)

White Truffles: Italian White Truffle (*Tuber magnatum*)

- Eastern White Truffle (Tuber canaliculatum)
- Pecan Truffle (Tuber lyonii)
- Spring White Truffle (Tuber gibbosum)
- Autumn White Truffle (Tuber oregonense)

Common Name: Black Truffles and White Truffles

Location: The truffle prefers to grow underground, where it prefers hardwood trees such as oak.

They may also be found underneath coniferous trees, such as the Douglas Fir. May often be dug up by animals.

Dimensions: Round, approximately 2 to 5 inches in diameter (5 to 12.5 cms)

Cap: While it does not have a cap, it may range from black, brown, reddish-brown, or yellowish colorations on its surface.

Stalk: No stalk, but the interior has veins with a marbled appearance.

Distinctive Features: One can detect the Black Truffle due to its scent, though each truffle has a unique combination of scents that make it distinct. It does smell earthy, though the earthiness may be tinged with the scent of flowers, garlic, chocolate, cheese, and spices, among the more notably detectable scents.

Dangerous Lookalikes: Numerous, though one can simply avoid them through the dissection of the body of the truffle, as the interior of the real truffle is marbled. If there is no marbled interior, then one can safely assume that what they hold is not a truffle.

Seasonality: The *T. oregonense* variety favors the months from October to March, whereas the T. *gibbosum* fruits from January to June. The Oregon Black Truffle may be found from fall to the middle of spring, where it can be found at its peak in the winter.

Soil Type: The Truffle prefers to thrive in soils that are loamy, and loose, with an even composition of silt, clay, and sand, with a pH range of 7.5 to 8.3. It does not thrive in soils that are acidic, but those that are mildly alkaline in their content.

Recent developments in the North American Truffle Growers Association have led to a reclassification and identification of the Truffle species that are commonly found in North America. While there is a dichotomy on black and white truffles that remain existent, there are several varieties that are found in North America that do not fall squarely into these two types of truffles. The Oregon Black Truffle for instance, is believed to be classified under the *Morchellaceae* family, as molecular analysis of the truffle shows similar characteristics with the *Fischerula* and *Imaia* genus. The species that are present however, would be described in the table that follows.

Species	Description
Oregon Black Truffle (*Leucangium carthusianum*)	Originally part of the *Hellvellaceae* family, it requires classification into the *Morchellaceae* family. It is often a dark olive color to a grayish-green and is smooth in texture.
Oregon White Truffle (*Tuber oregonense*)	The forager may find this in a range that extends from the southern parts of British Columbia in Canada, west of the Cascade ranges, to northern California in the United States. The advantage with this truffle is that it grows in a mycorrhizal relationship with the Douglas Fir, so one would be able to find these truffles at the base of these trees. The *T. oregonense* variety favors the months from October to March, whereas the *T. gibbosum* fruits from January to June. The body of the truffle is a rough round shape, with a white color that gradually transitions to a marbled tan color.

Species	Description
Oregon Brown Truffle (*Kalapuya brunnea*)	This truffle species is only found in the Pacific Northwest, where the forager may find it in a range from western Oregon to northern California. It has a rough, rather bumpy, reddish-brown surface that conceals a white interior at first, but later turns a mottled grayish-brown coloration as it matures. The forager may detect the scent of this truffle, as the scent is evocative of garlic and cheese, similar to Camembert infused with garlic. It is a prized culinary specimen in Oregon.
Pecan Truffle/American Brown Truffle (*Tuber lyonii*)	A species native to North America, it is often associated with the Pecan trees, though not limited to these trees as it can form a symbiotic relationship with other trees as well.
Chinese Truffle (*Tuber indicum*)	It is a species that directly competes with the Black Truffle. It has a smooth, dark red to dark-brown surface.

The truffle is synonymous with food that is not only rich, but luxurious in its quality. When one combines this with the knowledge that truffles are rare and in high demand among the epicures, then one can understand why truffles command such a high price. From the descriptions, it can be seen that the truffle requires some effort to locate as these mainly can be found underground. The pig is traditionally used to sniff out the truffle, as the truffles emit a scent derived from androstanol, a compound similar to the scent emitted by a male boar, which the female pig would eagerly sniff out. The main problem is that the pigs have the tendency to eat the truffle. It is too much trouble to handle and muzzle a pig. Dogs on the other hand can be used to sniff out, though one would have to train them not to dig at the soil with their claws. They do not eat the truffle, and thus one would have to use positive reinforcement with the use of a dog. Not much can be done with the truffle as it does not lend itself well to extended exposures to heat. The White truffle can be freshly shaved over pastas and rice dishes such as risottos. Black Truffles require a minimal amount of heat to ensure that their flavors are able to thoroughly permeate a dish, often through an oil or butter-based

medium. They may be used as a pate, or as a light layer over trout or the lightest crostinis. The truffle may be frozen or turned into a truffle paste or truffle compound butter. They may also be stored in the refrigerator in an air-tight container, or stored with rice, or eggs, where the truffle would be able to infuse its flavor into each grain and egg it is stored with.

5.3 Chanterelles

The Chanterelle is a mushroom so distinct that one can readily identify it without the use of sight, though this should only be attempted by veteran mushroom hunters and foragers. The Golden Chanterelle and the Black Trumpet may be found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, though care should still be taken to distinguish these two edible species from other species with a similar appearance. The Chanterelle is highly favored among mushroom hunters as it not only has a distinct coloration that greatly aids in its location and identification, but it also grows in sufficient amounts that a forager or mushroom hunter may freely pick from. It would also be remiss to neglect the incredible flavor that the Chanterelle possesses, as it is full-bodied enough to penetrate even through the presence of spices in the food.

Chanterelles (*Cantharellus cibarius*)

Smooth Chanterelle (*Cantharellus lateritius*)

White Chanterelle (*Cantharellus subalbidus*)

Common Name: Chanterelle, Golden Chanterelle, True Chanterelle, Smooth Chanterelle

Location: Grows on the ground, alone or in clusters. It prefers oak trees or other coniferous forests.

Dimensions: It may reach 2 to 3 inches in height, (5 to 7.5 cms) or higher.

Cap: The cap may have a diameter of 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cms) across, with lobed or wavy edges on the margins. It has a yellowish color. The underside of the cap has gills that are thick-edged, forked, and cross-veined that run into the stalk. The underside of the cap is yellowish as well.

Stalk: May reach 2 to 3 inches (5-7.5 cms) high, and an inch in thickness. The color may range from an off-white to a yellowish stalk.

Distinctive Features: One can detect the Chanterelle through its scent, reminiscent to that of Apricots.

Dangerous Lookalikes: The Jack O-Lantern (*Omphalotus spp.*) can potentially cause severe stomach upsets and may be found in North America. This mushroom grows at the base of trees, tree stumps, and in buried wood in lawns. The caps of this mushroom are circular whereas the cap of the Chanterelle is wavy, and the gills on the underside are sharp and do not fork. The Jack O-Lantern is more orange in its coloration while the Chanterelles are more yellow. In addition, the Jack O-Lantern does not have a distinct scent. The False Chanterelle (*Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*) is similar in appearance but is not poisonous. It prefers to grow in clusters on wood, and is bright orange in color, with gills that are forked and are attached to stalks that are slenderer than the chanterelle. The *Cortinarius* species can be found in North America and is a dangerous species, as consumption of this mushroom can lead to potentially fatal consequences. This mistake often takes place if the mushroom is solely identified by the color only. The mushrooms of this species are gilled but have no forks on the gills. There is a veil that covers the gills on the underside of the cap, and the mature gills turn a rusty brown color, which is also the color yielded by the spore print, whereas the Chanterelle is a yellowish color even on the underside.

Seasonality: The forager may find the Chanterelle in the summer months, though some quantities of Chanterelles may be found as late as September, underneath coniferous forests.

Soil Type: The Chanterelle thrives best in acidic soils with a pH of 4 to 5.5 pH. The soil is well-drained and has a low nitrogen content.

The Chanterelle is a highly prized mushroom among mushroom hunters due to the flavor it imparts to dishes once cooked. One would have to contend however, with the competition, as though they are able to be found in abundance, there are other mushroom hunters who not only collect for their own personal use, but also enough mushrooms to be sold commercially to restaurants. Continental Europe may be the traditional environment of the Chanterelle, but in North America, one may find several regional varieties of the mushroom. For one, the Chanterelles in California can grow larger than the varieties of the Chanterelle found in the Rocky Mountains. The oak forests of Northern California in the winter months may yield a large quantity of chanterelles at their base, though the forager would have to be careful with the co-occurrence of Poison Oak. It is possible to prevent the effects of Poison Oak, a shrub that grows beneath the oak tree, and it is best that the forager prepares for that eventuality. The Smooth Chanterelle may be found in the Eastern United States. It is similar in appearance to the Chanterelle but is distinguished by the smooth surface on the cap, whereas the True Chanterelle has gill-like folds. The Smooth Chanterelle greatly resembles the Black Trumpet Mushroom save for the color, and often grows alongside the true Chanterelle in the same biomes. It may also be found in oaks that are located in suburban and urban parklands, and the open oaken forests of the Eastern United States. *Cantharellus californicus* and *Cantharellus subalbidus* are found mainly in California and are noteworthy due to their size. Due to the immensity of their proportions, they are highly conspicuous and may be collected as they are still prized morsels. The Chanterelle best exhibits its flavor if gently sauteed. One would have to cook Chanterelles first before they undergo any form of preservation technique. Once sauteed, the mushrooms may be frozen. While there are dried chanterelles that are commercially available, and they may be rehydrated, the resultant mushroom does not bear any similarity to the texture of the fresh chanterelles, as the mushroom may be too tough for anyone to enjoy.

5.4 Black Trumpet

The Black Trumpet mushroom is considered to be the most fragrant of the mushrooms, and among the more visually imperceptible due to the coloration. The surface of the caps of the mushroom in question allow it to easily camouflage itself among the fallen leaves of trees, and may easily be overlooked by many, even by the more experienced foragers. It takes a certain amount of determination not to be cowed by this tendency of the Black Trumpet, and one would find these in abundance throughout the eastern part of the United States, as it has an extensive season in which they may be found. Foragers may also find the mushroom in the autumn and winter as it thrives in the rainforests of California and the Pacific Northwest.

Black Trumpet (*Craterellus cornucopioides; Craterellus fallax*)

Common Name: Black Trumpet, Trompette de la mort; Horn of Plenty

Location: The Black Trumpet mushroom often grows on the ground, either alone, or scattered in large numbers, where it prefers to thrive at the bases of the hardwood trees such as beech and oak.

Dimensions: It may reach up to 3 inches (7.5 cms) high.

Cap: The cap may have a diameter of 1.5 inches (3.8 cms) at the top where it gradually narrows to a base. The Cap is often trumpet-shaped, vase-shaped, or funnel-shaped.

Stalk: The stalk bears a similar appearance to the cap, in that it is trumpet-shaped, vase-shaped, or funnel-shaped. The exterior is gray to black in color.

Distinctive Features: Save for the dark colors, the Black trumpet shares a physical similarity with the Smooth Chanterelle in the previous chapter and has a distinct scent.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous look alike species to the Black Trumpet. While the *Craterellus* genus may not appear often, they are just as edible as the Black Trumpet itself.

Seasonality: In the Eastern United States, from the summer months to early September; whereas in the Western United States; they may be found from the autumn to winter months.

Soil Type: It prefers heavy, calcareous soils- that is to say, soils that have been enriched with the shells and bones of long-dead marine life, where the mushroom prefers to grow in areas that are rich in moss. They also thrive in sandy soils.

The mushroom may be readily overlooked even by the most veteran foragers as it is quite dark in color. It is a mushroom that should be eaten only while it is fresh. The older mushrooms may be slightly decayed and are shiny with a discernible aroma. Though the older Black Trumpets are still edible, they are not digestible, so one should exercise caution in the consumption of this type of mushroom. The mushroom can be readily picked and cleaned, though one should take care to brush off the grit that may lodge in the mushroom flesh. Those mushrooms that are picked from sandy soils may be washed and dried with a paper towel without any loss to flavor, as the mushroom is resilient enough. The flavor lends itself well to omelets and sauces that are complementary to a seafood course.

The black trumpet may be dried for future use and last several years. Once rehydrated, they may be used in a variety of dishes without any detractions from the meal they are added to.

5.5 Tooth Fungi

Despite the rather grim description of the fungus, the descriptor refers to the mushrooms that produce tooth-like projections or spines that stem from the mushroom itself, rather than the formation of gills or pores on the underside of the cap. Once a forager is able to cut through the surface of the "teeth", it would be possible to see the cap and the stalk of the mushroom, with the spines projected from the underside of the cap. Thus, beneath the fearsome appearance of the mushroom itself, it is possible to discern the mushroom beneath it all. The appearance of the mushroom would make it very apparent to the forager as it is unique enough to stand out from other mushrooms and growths that one may find in the woodlands. There are few mushrooms that are noteworthy as edibles in this family of fungi, however.

Bear's Head (*Hericium americanum; Hericium caput-ursi*)

Waterfall Tooth (*Hericium abietis*)

Lion's Mane Mushroom (*Hericium erinaceus*)

Icicle Mushroom (*Hericium coralloides; Hericium ramosum*)

Common Name: Bear's Head, Monkey's Head, Lion's Mane, Pom-Pom, Icicle Fungus, or Waterfall Fungus

Location: The body of the mushroom tends to attach to trees or logs, so one can find them suspended from the air on a tree, or on a log closer to the ground. There are several that may appear in an area where one is found. While on the eastern coast, the mushroom may be found on hardwood trees and logs, whereas on the western coasts, it can be found in the coniferous forests.

Dimensions: It may span a length of 3 to 12 inches (7.5 to 30.5 cms) but may grow bigger than this.

Cap: The cap may span a length of 3 to 12 inches (7.5 to 30.5 cms); however, it would be difficult to discern through the spines. The spines that emanate from the underside of the cap tend to be round or vertically elongated, but never bracketed or shelf-like in their arrangement.

Stalk: The stalk bears a similar appearance to the cap, though it is obscured by the presence of the spines on the cap. It is visible once the mushroom has been sliced into.

Distinctive Features: The appearance of the mushroom alone is distinctive enough to help in its identification. The surface is white, while it is still fresh. The spines point downwards and are soft and fleshy in their texture. The spines themselves may be branched or unbranched.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous look alike species to the Bear's Head. There are look-alikes though that are inedible such as the Northern Tooth (*Climacodon septentrionale*) whose flesh is tough and has a shelf-like attachment on trees. The spines that hang from it are suspended from a bracket-like arrangement of the broad caps.

Seasonality: In the Eastern United States and Western United States, it is best found in the autumn months.

Soil Type: It does not grow on the ground, but rather attached to hardwood trees, or on the logs of hardwood trees, or conifers if one is on the western coast of North America.

The Bear's head mushroom is just one type of edible mushroom that may be found in this family, and despite its extraterrestrial appearance while suspended from a tree or attached to a fallen log, the taste of the mushroom is particularly sublime as it is reminiscent to that of crabmeat, particularly when the mushroom tends to fall apart like lump crab meat. If one does not wish to forage for this delicacy, it is possible to find this mushroom in upscale food markets or served in Chinese restaurants where it is referred to as the pom-pom at times, given its physical similarities to the said object.

One of the main predicaments with the forage of this mushroom is how to get it down intact, as its location is not conducive to its ready harvest. The effort undertaken though, is well worth the effort as the mushroom itself contains the flavor of crabs, and its appearance and texture are similar to that of crab meat, that one can safely indulge in the flavor of crabs in any dish, as one bear's head mushroom is enough to feed one dinner party, or for several meals if one is the solitary type. The mushroom should be used while white and fresh, as once it ages and turns yellow, it begins to decline in quality.

Of the four species mentioned in the table, the Waterfall Mushroom prefers to thrive upon conifers in the western United States, whereas the other species thrive on the Hardwood forests of the eastern United States. This is one mushroom that is readily overlooked as when one forages for mushrooms, one does not think to look up in the air. The bear's head mushroom tends to hang suspended from the branches, or at the very least, attached to a fallen log of a hardwood or conifer tree. The mushroom may be found at least 8

feet above the ground, and it is often a two-person job to catch the mushroom actually successfully before it hits the ground, as impact with the ground can cause the mushroom to break into several pieces that would be extremely difficult to collect.

To cook the mushroom, the mushroom should be washed and pulled apart carefully. One can wash the mushroom as it does not take on water. The pieces, once examined closely, are reminiscent to crab, and the flavor, as mentioned earlier, is evocative of the same. A cook can easily slice up the mushroom pieces and sauté them in a bit of butter, and some aromatics (garlic or shallots) and finish with a squeeze of citrus to complement and bring out the seafood like flavor that the mushroom has. There are times though that it can be bitter, and it should be parboiled first, with the water thrown away, then cooked as needed. To preserve this, it can be cooked until it is almost dry, and then frozen.

5.6 Hedgehog (Sweet Tooth) Mushrooms

The Hedgehog Mushroom is by all means a summer mushroom, commonly encountered if one is of a mind to walk through a forest where hemlocks and hardwood trees abound. It would be hard to miss the sight of the mushrooms as their bright yellow to orange caps contrast with the shadows and dark leaves created by the trees on whose bases, they are able to thrive on. The yellow mushrooms are more often than not, the chanterelle mushrooms discussed earlier in this book. The orange-colored caps, however, are more likely to belong to the hedgehog mushroom. The mushroom tends to be larger in its body, and more abundant if harvested in the fall months due to its tendency to grow in larger patches by that time. However, the summer harvest of the hedgehog mushrooms is sufficient enough in quantity to elevate a dinner into a sublime experience.

Hedgehog Mushrooms (*Hydnum repandum*)

Common Name: Hedgehog, Sweet Tooth Mushroom, Pied de Mouton

Location: Grows on the ground, either alone or scattered across a large patch; usually under trees where it prefers those woodlands with coniferous trees.

Dimensions: It may reach up to 2-4 inches (5-10 cms) in height, 2 inches (5 cms) across or sometimes larger in the autumn months.

Cap: The cap may span a diameter of 2 inches (5 cms) across, though as stated, this may be exceeded in the fall months when the

mushroom cap grows larger. The caps are orange or cream in their natural state, but when bruised the cap will transition into a yellow-orange color. The underside of the cap will show the presence of small, fragile, orange spines that break easily.

Stalk: The stalk is colored off-white but may sometimes have a light coloration.

Distinctive Features: The appearance of the mushroom alone is distinctive enough to help in its identification. The surface of the caps is orange to cream in color; and though there is a similar species *Hydnum umbilicatum*, it is an edible species as well.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous lookalike species to the Hedgehog Mushroom, as the other tooth fungi that exist are not orange, nor are they soft, fleshy, and fragile. The Hedgehog may often be confused with the Chanterelle mushrooms, however, an examination of the underside of the caps will immediately resolve the confusion.

Seasonality: In the Eastern United States and Western United States, it is best found in summer months, though larger harvests and larger mushrooms may be found in the fall months.

Soil Type: It grows in neutral to acidic soils, however, the mushroom tends to adapt to a variety of soils which makes it a very common sight in most forests.

The Hedgehog mushroom is a species of the toothed fungi, but despite this relationship, it more closely resembles the chantarelle, with which it is often confused or mixed with by other foragers due to the similar color scheme of the caps of these two fungi, though both are highly edible. There are some corrections that have to be made in the name however, as though the mushroom is named as the Hedgehog mushroom, there are no hedgehogs in the United States, and thus the name Sweet Tooth was coined to accommodate this geographical variance. The other similar species to the Hedgehog, the *Hydnum umbilicatum* is so named as the cap is visibly indented in the center, similar to a belly button where the umbilical cord was once attached. In this instance, the mushroom is just as edible with

the size as the main difference between the two types of mushrooms. Both species thrive in the coniferous forests and hardwood woodlands of the temperate regions of the United States. The nutty flavor of the hedgehog mushroom is often brought out once it has been gently cooked in a bit of butter or oil, where the sauce should be one that allows the hedgehog to be moistened by the sauce and at the same time, the sauce absorbs the unique flavor of the mushroom as it cooks. The addition of toasted nuts such as hazelnuts and almonds will complement the flavor greatly. As with the bear's head mushroom, if the cap is bitter, parboil the mushrooms in a bit of water, discard the water afterwards and cook as one would the fresh mushroom. One may also opt to use the hedgehog mushrooms in lieu of recipes that call for the use of chanterelles.

5.7 Coral Fungi

The coral fungi are a family of fungi so named due to their physical resemblance with the corals one would normally find underwater. The mushrooms grow in such abundance and populate the forest floors with their resplendent colorations in the fall and spring months where they prefer to thrive in the coniferous forests. Though some species may be found in the hardwood forests, they tend to be smaller and less colorful than their coniferous compatriots. There are at least a hundred different species, though only a few are noteworthy enough to be identified. The coloration of the caps of the mushrooms ranges from end to end of the spectrum as while some may be a bright red to yellow, other mushrooms in this family can run from orange, orange, brown, down to various shades of purple, though some species may be achromatic altogether, and be simply white. The caps have the same variation in size from an inch to a foot across. The predicament with the coral fungus is that, because of the variance in their appearances, it would be difficult to properly find one that can be readily identified due to its distinct appearances, in the same way other mushrooms are. While some are edible yes, and they may be found sold to restaurants by other foragers, there are some species that when ingested, will cause diarrhea to manifest in the person who unwittingly consumes a specie of the mushroom that has not been sufficiently identified. Not to fear though, as none of the species are poisonous. The only dilemma that arises is that there is little to go on about the species that are edible and the species that can cause gastrointestinal upsets. Thus, the species that are to be

listed here are ones that may be found in some produce stands or upscale food markets, as these are the ones at least known to be completely safe for human consumption.

Sweet Coral Club (*Clavariadelphus truncatus*)

Common Name: Sweet Coral Club, Flat-Topped Coral

Location: The Sweet Coral Club tends to thrive in bunches under coniferous forests and on forest floors that have a lot of moss. The Sweet Coral Club may be found in abundance in the Rocky Mountains, where it enjoys vogue as a dessert mushroom.

Dimensions: It may reach up to 3 inches (7.5 cms) in height.

Cap: The cap may span a diameter of 1 inch (2.5 cms) across and are colored yellow to orange. They are thick at the top of the cap, which may lead to it having a flat-topped appearance, where the cap narrows down towards the base.

Stalk: The stalk is colored off-white to white as the cap transitions to the stalk of the mushroom, in that the whole mushroom resembles a club in appearance.

Distinctive Features: The taste of the mushroom is quite sweet if bitten into.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous lookalike species to the Sweet Coral Club however, the *Clavariadelphus pistillaris* may have a similar appearance but is very bitter if bitten into.

Seasonality: In the Rocky Mountains, whereas with the other coral mushrooms, they are at their best in fall to spring months.

Soil Type: It grows in the mountainous regions, mostly in the Rocky Mountains, where it thrives in mossy soil.

The Sweet Coral Club is a mushroom that thrives only in a specific geographic region, namely the Rocky Mountains of the United States, where the forager may readily identify it as it grows in bunches and the yellow to orange caps make a distinct contrast against the dark green of the moss and conifers where it chooses to

have a mycorrhizal relationship with. Due to the color of their caps, they may be easily spotted and can be readily gathered as there are few other mushrooms that carry the aforementioned characteristics in the table. It is the only one of its species that is sweet, as any other look-alike species are quite bitter and unpalatable.

While the idea of a dessert mushroom may seem to be slightly off-kilter, even for the most adventurous cook, it would be a complete tragedy if one were to use this mushroom as a component for a savory dish, which only serves to stifle its flavor profile. Rather than a savory ingredient for soups and stir-fries, the cook would make best use of the mushroom when they tempura fry the mushrooms in a light batter. A light dusting of confectioner's sugar over the top will gild the lily perfectly, as the mushroom does not need a lot to make its flavor stand out. It may be served alone, or with seasonal fruits to heighten the sweetness that the mushroom brings to the table. Once cooked, the mushrooms may also be preserved. The cook simply has to freeze the mushroom and thaw once needed.

Eastern US Cauliflower Mushrooms (*Sparassis spathulata*)

Western US Cauliflower Mushrooms (*Sparassis crispa*)

Common Name: Cauliflower Mushrooms

Location: The eastern variety of mushrooms tends to favor the base of hardwood trees. The western variety of mushroom favors the conifers.

Dimensions: Both mushrooms may span up to a foot across (30.5 cms) and reach a foot high (30.5 cms) and are rounded in appearance.

Cap: The cap may span a diameter of up to a foot across (30.5 cms) and it is rounded in appearance. The cap is folded, in that the entire cap of the mushroom resembles a series of folds to form the body of the mushroom. It may run from off-white to yellowish in color, and have flattened, leaf-like branches that it emanates from.

Stalk: The eastern variety of the Cauliflower Mushroom has no stalk. The western variety has a long rooting stalk, that is commonly attached to conifers.

Distinctive Features: The appearance of the mushroom is distinct enough that one cannot mistake the cauliflower mushroom for any other species.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous lookalike species to the Cauliflower Mushroom. The only species that bears any similarity to it are the other aged Coral Fungi (genus *Ramaria*) where the cauliflower mushroom is flatter, leaf-like and elastic in appearance, while the latter species is more fragile and pencil-shaped. *Tremella foliacea* is a jelly-like fungus that may appear like the Cauliflower Mushroom; however, it is stiff and rubbery. The Cauliflower Mushroom should be cleaned carefully and thoroughly and cooked well.

Seasonality: The forager may find the eastern variety from July to as late as September, whereas the western variety may be found from autumn to winter. The general season for both varieties is from the Summer to Fall months.

Soil Type: It grows in the hardwood forests for the eastern variety, while the western variety attaches itself to conifers. The soil type would be one native to those regions.

The cauliflower mushroom has a very curious appearance in that it resembles a folded-up series of ruffs, and that these ruffs in turn, are leafy and elastic in their appearance and texture, that gives the cauliflower mushroom some unique culinary properties. There are no mushrooms that can be mistaken for either variety of the Cauliflower Mushroom simply because of how unique the mushroom is. They are also quite large as some species may grow up to a foot in diameter and height. Because of the labyrinthine folds that comprise the mushroom body, it is a necessary task to run the cauliflower mushroom under water and brush the folds thoroughly to remove soil and the detritus of other plants that may have inserted into the crevices of the mushroom cap. This would also help the forager identify which parts are of the mushroom. The forager and cook who

cleans the mushroom would not have to worry about the absorption of water, as the cauliflower mushroom does not have this quality and one may safely wash this under water to ensure that all other types of particulates have been discarded from the mushroom body. To cook the mushroom, one does not cook it as one does cauliflower. It is recommended that the mushroom be parboiled, and the water discarded before it is used in the desired culinary preparation. To take advantage of the uniqueness of the mushroom, they may be sliced up and substituted for flat pasta. Once cooked, it is possible for the forager to freeze the mushrooms and preserve them for later use.

5.8 Boletes

Perhaps one of the more familiar mushrooms that one encounters in the produce section of the grocery, the bolete is familiar to the Italians as a porcini mushroom, whereas the French call this the Ceps. Germans call the mushroom steinpilz, where the Russians refer to it as belyi grib. From this wide geographical variation, it can be reasonably assumed that the boletes are one of those mushrooms whose popularity transcends an entire continent, in this case Europe, where the various nationalities that are located in that area have their own respective uses for the Boletes in their countries. It is a mushroom that sees more popularity when contrasted with the morel and chanterelle mushrooms and is more readily available than even the truffle. In North America however, the king bolete mushroom is one of the more highly prized mushrooms that a forager can bring to the table, as it is widely available in the northeastern United States, in California and in the Rocky Mountains. Due to the popularity and abundance of the species, some time has to be devoted to a discussion of the species that may be found under the bolete family. Collectively, they are stalked mushrooms that may be found on the ground at the bases of the trees. The caps themselves are soft and spongy to the touch, where some species are truly edible and are sublime in their taste, whereas some species taste simply of mushroom with no sublime contribution to a dish they are mixed in. They are among the safest families of mushrooms to eat as many foragers harvest other forms of boletes that may be used in lieu of other boletus species. There are

still outlier species however, that need to be avoided. The *Suillus* species of boletes have a slimy cap and may be found at the base of coniferous trees. The sliminess of the caps is a necessary characteristic that enables them to withstand the effects of winter frost. They are edible, however, it is necessary that the sliminess be removed from the caps through several swipes of a paper towel, or simply peeling the cap, as it is a laxative. The *Tylopilus* species of boletes are quite bitter, particularly the *Tylopilus felleus* that bears a strong physical resemblance to the king bolete mushroom when young, but when cooked, has a very bitter taste that does not dissipate even with the most stringent culinary preparations available.

The poisonous species on the other hand, may have some form of identification where the spongy layer on the underside of the cap-colored orange too is red, where they gradually turn blue to black once they are bruised. This is not to say that all species of the bolete that exhibit this characteristic are poisonous as some may be edible. The other species are poisonous, but they do not have any fatal consequences if consumed. The color change to blue is a reaction with the oxidation of the interior of the bolete once an incision has been made to the stem. *Boletus sensibilis* is a species that can turn from yellow to indigo once a knife has incised into the stalk. Consumption of this species may lead to gastrointestinal upsets, as will *Boletus huronensis,* another species that can cause the same upsets though there are no visible colorations once it has been cut into.

The following species of bolete are edible and may be safely foraged for:

- *Leccinums* are a species of bolete that are edible and may be found at the base of aspen and birch trees. They have stalks that are covered with hair-like scales.
- *Boletus bicolor* or the two-colored bolete is a species of bolete that may be found only on the eastern coast of the United States.
- *Boletus appendiculatus,* better known as the butter bolete, may be found in California where it begins to make an appearance at the first autumn rain showers.

- *Gyroporus castaneus* or the Chestnut Bolete is mostly found in eastern North America.

The King Bolete though remains a prize catch among veteran mushroom hunters, and it makes its appearance in the woodlands of California in the late spring months, particularly in June. Oddly enough, there is also a queen bolete that is equally as catchy a prize as the king bolete. The eastern United States has their own version of the King Bolete that tends to thrive at the base of the Norway spruce though there are others that may be found under Eastern hemlock. The version that may be found in Colorado may be found at the base of the Engelmann spruce and though genetically different from the king bolete, shares enough characteristics to warrant its classification as a king bolete. Those of European descent would know how to make use of the Bolete mushrooms, as this is a key ingredient to many hearty soups to warm one on a cold winter night. The stems are more often discarded as these are often too tough and fibrous to be consumed. It is best to pare the stems from the caps before the caps are used in any culinary preparations as this may result in an uneven cooking time and may ruin the dish. The bolete is a mushroom that can be dried well, as cooks who regularly utilize dried porcini mushrooms can attest to. However, only the caps are the part that is best dried. Once dried, they may be stored for several years, where to use them, the cook simply has to rehydrate the dried porcinis in water or stock and use the mushroom as one would a fresh porcini. The dried version is often the one marketed in most groceries and specialty markets.

Bolete (*Boletus edulis* complex; *Boletus clavipes*; *Boletus pinacola* and *Boletus pinophilus*)

Common Name: King Bolete, Porcini, Ceps, Steinpilz,

Location: Widely available in the northeastern United States, in California and in the Rocky Mountains, where the mushroom grows at the base of trees. Eastern areas see the bolete grow beneath Norway spruce and Eastern Hemlock, while those in Colorado favor the base of the Engelmann spruce.

Dimensions: The king bolete and other species may reach up to a foot (30.5 cms) in height.

Cap: The domed, reddish-brown caps have white (if young) and spongy underside.

Stalk: The stalk of the bolete is brown, and often widens toward the base to become bulbous in shape. The upper portion of the stalk has an apparent, white, net-like pattern.

Distinctive Features: The appearance of the mushroom is distinct enough and is quite commonplace for one to mistake the bolete for other species, though most bolete species may be used in place of the king bolete save for a few exceptions.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous look alike species to the King Bolete mushroom however there are other species such as the *Boletus huronensis* which can cause stomach upsets; and the *Tylopilus felleus* which are quite bitter and unpalatable regardless of the culinary preparations used. The latter is identifiable as the mature version of the bolete turns pinkish once mature, and the pattern on the stalk is black rather than white.

Seasonality: The forager may find the eastern variety from July to as late as September, whereas the western variety may be found from autumn to winter. The general season for both varieties is from the Summer to Fall months.

Soil Type: It grows in the hardwood forests for the eastern variety, while the western variety attaches itself to conifers. The soil type would be one native to those regions.

5.9 Polypores

The polypore is a familiar site for many foragers, gardeners, and hikers as these are the types of fungi that are commonly found attached to trees, in a shelf-like formation, or a bracket. There is an abundance of fungi that fall under this categorization; however, the majority of these fungi are similar to the wood that they are attached to, in that they are tough and too woody for human consumption. The family is so named for the porous surfaces on the undersides of the caps, as the layer on the underside of the cap is comprised of numerous pores, rather than gills or spines, through which the spores are ejected to enable the reproduction of the fungus.

Chicken Mushroom (*Laetiporus conifericola*)

Common Name: Chicken Mushroom

Location: The forager may find the Chicken Mushroom in a large range from southern Alaska all the way to California, where it prefers to attach itself to coniferous species, and on the stumps and logs of fallen trees. It may be found on its own, or in large clusters.

Dimensions: May reach up to a foot across (30.5 cms) in width.

Cap: The cap of the mushroom is the most visible part, up to a foot wide (30.5 cms), visibly orange cap with a porous yellow surface. The White Chicken Mushroom (*Laetiporus cincinnatis*) has a pink to orange cap, with a porous white surface, and prefers to attach to hardwood trees.

Stalk: The chicken mushroom does not have a stalk, as it attaches directly to the tree.

Distinctive Features: The orange cap of the mushroom is distinct enough for it to be identified, and one would need to look for the porous underside of the mushroom, which can be white or yellow depending on the variety.

Dangerous Lookalikes: There are no poisonous look alike species to the Chicken Mushroom. Other polypore mushrooms that are of a similar size do not have the same color; whereas those that share the same color but not the size, the mushrooms are too tough to eat.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushrooms in the summer to fall months.

Soil Type: It does not grow on soil but is attached directly to the conifers of the Western coast. Eastern coast varieties prefer to thrive in the hardwood forests.

Caution: Anyone who is on a prescription of any Monoamide Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOI), a form of antidepressant, should not consume any dish that contains Chicken Mushrooms as the mushrooms contain tyramine, an amino acid that interacts with the medication that may result in the occurrence of extrapyramidal symptoms. In addition, there are some people who may find the chicken mushroom indigestible and may suffer from stomach cramps.

The Chicken Mushroom is considered one of the few polypore mushrooms that are edible. The texture and flavor of the mushroom is reminiscent to that of chicken, and is readily identifiable by the coloration and quantity, that it can hardly be mistaken for other similar polypore species. One may find the chicken mushroom at least 10 feet above ground, attached to hardwoods and other conifer species that may be found on the eastern and western coasts of North America.

The mushrooms are best eaten while still young and succulent. Their flavor is best brought out when one slices the mushroom into smaller pieces, and cooks them in some butter, and covered with a bit of stock. Allow it to cook for half an hour before it is served. While it is possible to use the mushroom in a drier application, a word of caution to the cook, as this mushroom can readily absorb the fat from the butter before it is even fully cooked. The main concern with this mushroom is that because of the flavor, one can easily succumb to gluttonous tendencies, and result in an unpleasantly full sensation. This is a mushroom that must be eaten in moderation simply because too much of a good thing can be bad. The chicken mushroom is one that is best preserved, first by cooking it and freezing. This mushroom does not dry well, nor does it rehydrate well like other mushrooms.

Hen-of-the-Woods Mushroom (*Grifola frondosa*)

Common Name: Hen of the Woods, Maitake

Location: The forager may find the Hen of the Woods Mushroom may be found attached to oak trees in any part of the Northern Hemisphere except for the Rocky Mountain areas, and the western coast of North America. It is more commonly found in the northeastern and north-central parts of the continent.

Dimensions: May reach up to a yard (1 m) across, in certain times and may weigh up to 5 lbs (2.5 kgs).

Cap: The mushroom is actually a composite of several mushrooms that comprise several small, fleshy, grayish-brown caps with a white underside. This may reach up to two feet (61 cms) across.

Stalk: The short stems of the mushrooms connect the cap to the base of the mushroom, which is attached to the oak tree.

Distinctive Features: The mushroom is a fleshy, bracket-like fungus, that looks similar to a whirling skirt, due to the presence of the clustered caps that are attached to the base of the mushroom.

Lookalikes: The black-staining polypore (*Meripilus sumstinei*) grows on buried wood rather than on the live trees and gives the illusion that it grows on the ground. The edge of the mushrooms turns black when damaged, and also turn black if subjected to any culinary preparation. While young, the mushroom is rather edible though more mature versions become indigestible. The other umbrella polypore (*Polyporus umbellatus*) is actually an edible species, that is lighter in color. It grows on the ground and may be found from summer to early fall in the United States, where it rises from a fungal base that resembles a potato.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushrooms in the summer to fall months.

Soil Type: It does not grow on soil but is attached directly to the oak trees of the Northern Hemisphere.

Caution: Anyone who is on a prescription of any Monoamide Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOI), a form of antidepressant, should not consume any dish that contains Chicken Mushrooms as the mushrooms contain tyramine, an amino acid that interacts with the medication that may result in the occurrence of extrapyramidal symptoms. In addition, there are some people who may find the chicken mushroom indigestible and may suffer from stomach cramps.

The Hen of the Woods mushroom is one that is much prized in Japanese cuisine, where it is known as the Maitake mushroom. The mushroom body can become quite large, up to 3 feet across, particularly where oak trees are plentiful, and the forager can be assured of a very abundant and hefty harvest. There may be more than one set of mushrooms that can be found at the base of an oak

tree, and more often than not, the forager does not have to wander far to find the hen-of-the-woods mushrooms.

The mushroom is so proliferative that foragers can simply opt to cover-up the mushroom and allow it to grow a bit more before they can return to harvest the bigger product. There are instances though, when the search for the mushroom can become so competitive that one has to contend with not only other mushroom foragers but also cooks who prize the maitake just as much. One would not need to go far, as if the parklands and urban areas have oak trees, one can easily find the mushroom there, although again, one would have to seek permission from the necessary authorities to be able to forage the mushroom without further incident.

The mushroom is best cooked in a shallow pan with a bit of fat such as butter or vegetable oil, though one can opt to use a more flavorful fat to enhance the quality of the flavor. Unlike the chicken mushroom, the flesh of the hen-of-the-woods mushroom is thinner by comparison and would have a shorter cooking time. It only needs a minimum amount of salt, as with most mushrooms, and one should season towards the end so that the flavor of the dish does not get watered down by the mushrooms as they exude water once salted. It is delectable as an entrée, but it also makes for an excellent complement to seafood and meat. Smaller caps may be subjected to a pickle brine for a contrast to all the richness.

Preservation of the mushroom calls for cooking it and freezing after, though one can readily fill up a freezer with several months of frozen mushrooms. The maitake dries well, and once rehydrated, it can be used just as well as a fresh mushroom in soups and other dishes that call for a wild mushroom to be used.

5.10 Puffballs

These are often the denizens of the Southern Hemisphere and can grow quite large to the point that a single mushroom is sufficient to feed an entire family on its flesh. One does not have to go far however, as there are also puffballs to be found on both sides of the United States. There is very little introduction needed, or descriptions, as the mushroom is literally a big puffball, and one can often find the description “giant” attached to it. One would readily find the giant puffball in meadows and grassy fields where it can grow with other mushrooms. It cannot be mistaken for any other species, as all puffballs are edible, and because of their color, and size, no other mushroom species even has any physical resemblance to the mushroom. The only mistake the forager can possibly make is if the mushroom is in a soccer field, and the mushroom can be overlooked as it can resemble a ball at times.

Giant Puffballs (Eastern US Variant) – (*Calvatia gigantea*)

Giant Puffballs (Western US Variant) – (*Calvatia booniana*)

Common Name: Giant Puffball

Location: The forager may find the Giant Puffball in lawns, grassy areas, meadows, urban parklands and in the mountainous regions of the eastern and western United States. Due to their size, they would be difficult to overlook, and may be readily seen from transport. They have the tendency to grow in fairy rings, and thus, one can harvest more than one puffball, though the need would be highly unlikely as

one is sufficiently large enough to provide the food for several people.

Dimensions: May reach up to 2-3 feet (61 to 91 cms) across.

Cap: The mushroom is a large two to three-foot wide mushroom that aptly enough is a white sphere, that could often be mistaken for a ball.

Stalk: The giant puffball does not have a stalk.

Distinctive Features: The size of the puffball is a reliable indicator that that would be the giant puffball, in addition to this, the giant puffball is usually a large, white sphere that one finds on the ground. An incision made to split the interior would reveal a pure white flesh with no discolorations. The *Gigantea* variety is pure white and firm while still young, though the spore upon maturity will tinge it to a greenish yellow. It will eventually split to begin the release of the spores in a large puff.

Lookalikes: While the name of the puffball has the descriptor giant attached to it, there are other species of smaller puffballs. *Calvatia cyathiformis* is at least a foot wide (30.5 cms). Once matured however, the white interior changes color to a dark violet. It is only edible while the interior is still white, and the mushroom is immature. Other species may be poisonous, such as the Toxic False Puffball, characterized by a very thick skin, despite its white interior.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushrooms from August to October.

Soil Type: It does not have a specific type of soil preference, as it can thrive in the parklands, mountains, grasslands, and meadows where the mushroom may grow to its large size.

Caution: The forager may only eat the mushrooms that are still young, with a pure white fleshy interior. Mushrooms with any discoloration in their interior should not be consumed.

This is the type of mushroom that grows in a fairy ring, which would assure the forager that there would be a plentiful supply of the

puffballs. One can consider, however, why would anyone want to gather more than one or two puffballs, due to their immense size and weight. A single puffball is sufficient to feed a large party of people, and one can expect to have leftovers where a puffball is concerned. Cooking a puffball requires that the cook forgets the more traditional oil or butter sauteed mushrooms, as the puffball flesh tends to be rendered greasy with this method. It is possible to slice the puffball thinly first, then prepare a breading station with eggs and panko (Japanese) breadcrumbs and treated like a cutlet of meat. They are shallow fried until golden-brown on both sides. While the size may warrant leftovers, and it is possible to preserve them once cooked, the puffball is best tasted when used while fresh and in its prime.

5.11 Lobster Mushrooms

Mushroom foragers of North America from Canada to Mexico would be thrilled to know that the Lobster Mushroom is a species endemic to the continent, though it has lately been exported to areas where its demand as a gourmet food item has risen. There is a bit of a curious predicament with the lobster mushroom as unlike the other mushrooms that have been eaten or picked in their purest possible state, the mushroom itself is a composite of a parasite that has bonded with an unpalatable mushroom, which renders the resultant mushroom with a significantly improved flavor, texture, and color than the host mushroom. Where some mushrooms may eventually be cultivated, due to the unique conditions in which this mushroom is created, this mushroom can only be gathered, where it is abundant in the months of summer and autumn.

Lobster Mushroom (*Hypomyces lactifluorum*)

Note: The scientific name of the Lobster Mushroom is derived from the parasite that has insinuated itself into the host mushroom. The host mushroom is unknown though there are a few candidates such as the White Russula (*Russula brevipes*) or the Milkcap (*Lactarius sp.*)

Common Name: Lobster Mushroom

Location: The forager may find the Lobster Mushroom close to the ground, in woodlands populated by either conifers or hardwood

trees.

Dimensions: May reach up to a height of 3 to 6 inches (7.5 to 15 cms)

Cap: The cap has an irregular shape, that ranges in color from orange-to-orange red. The underside of the cap is covered with tiny pustule-like bumps which is indicative of the parasite that has bonded with the host mushroom.

Stalk: The lobster mushroom has a short stalk, though the length is dependent upon the host mushroom of the parasite.

Distinctive Features: The color of the mushroom is orange to orange red, which extends to the stalk of the mushroom.

Lookalikes: The lobster mushroom does not have any known look-alike species, due to perhaps the unique conditions that give rise to it.

Seasonality: Foragers may find mushrooms from the summer to fall months.

Soil Type: It prefers sandy soil, particularly when located near conifers. One can look in places where there are conifers or in woodlands that have hardwood trees. They are also prone to grow in moist soils such as those near alder trees.

Caution: No specific caution warnings, save that the mushroom should be thoroughly cleaned before used in any culinary preparations.

The Lobster mushroom as mentioned earlier is a unique delicacy that results from the conversion of a host mushroom, most likely the White Russula or a Milk Cap, by a parasite into a mushroom that has been given a significant boost in its texture and flavor. The parasite in this instance, has rendered what is unpalatable to something that is sublime in its flavor. The mushroom itself can be quite large that one to two pieces would suffice for a couple with dinner plans. This mushroom should be cleaned well before it is cooked. Their nutty, lobster-like flavor comes out when it is used to make a soup, or even

grilled lightly to evoke a grilled lobster tail. Once cooked, one can safely preserve the lobster mushroom.

5.12 Jelly Mushroom

Connoisseurs of Chinese cuisine and perhaps those who have indulged in the occasional Chinese takeout must have tried the piquant juxtaposition of the hot and sour soup, where one would find samples of this family of mushroom among the various ingredients that make up the broth and body of the soup. One might then ask, that was a mushroom. The answer would be yes, it is a mushroom, but unlike its more flavorful relatives, the jelly mushroom is there primarily for texture in the soup, as it has a texture that provides a crunchy contrast to the soup, and it also lends itself well to stir-fried noodles. It is included in this type of cuisine mostly, because the Chinese use it for its medicinal purposes, rather than its culinary use. It can be reasoned out then, that wherever there is a large diaspora of Chinese Immigrants, one can encounter the wood-ear mushroom, the more common member of this species of fungi, cultivated by the Chinese for medicinal and culinary purposes.

Wood-Ear Mushroom (*Auricularia auricula*; *Auricularia polytricha*)

Note: The *A. polytricha* is the variety that is commonly cultivated by the Chinese.

Common Name: Wood-Ear; Cloud-Ear, Tree-Ear, Mu-Her, Taingang Daga

Location: The forager may find the Wood Ear Mushroom, either alone or in groups, in woodlands populated by either conifer, hardwood trees, a mix of both, and on fallen logs throughout North America. They may also be found in the tropical and subtropical regions of North America, though there may be some variation in the species.

Dimensions: May reach up to 2 inches (5 cms) or so, in width.

Cap: The cap resembles an ear in shape, hence the name. The flesh is thin, elastic, and is brown to charcoal colored.

Stalk: The wood ear mushroom does not have a stalk as it is attached directly to the trees.

Distinctive Features: The texture of the mushroom is rubbery and elastic, almost jelly-like in quality.

Lookalikes: The brown cup fungi have similar physical characteristics except that where the wood-ear mushrooms are pliable and elastic, the brown cup fungi will readily break when bent.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushrooms from the summer to the late fall months, as the physical structure of the mushroom makes it more frost resistant than other types of mushrooms.

Soil Type: It does not have specific soil type as it prefers to attach to trees and logs as the substrate medium in which it grows.

Caution: Those foragers and those who might consume a meal on mushrooms, and who have been prescribed anticoagulant medications (Heparin, Warfarin, and to some extent Aspirin), should seek medical assistance first, prior to the inclusion of this mushroom in the diet, as the consumption of this mushroom may potentially lengthen the clotting time of the blood in the body.

The wood-ear mushroom is reputed to possess a variety of medicinal properties when consumed. It is reputed to be an anticoagulant; antiviral, it is supposed to be good for the overall cardiovascular health of the body, it can suppress the formation of tumors and it can

enhance the overall immune function of the body. With a plethora of alleged medical benefits that the mushroom contains, one can at least attempt to try to include this mushroom more in stir-fried dishes or soups, simply to attain the benefits that one can get from the use of this mushroom. If one does not wish to forage for the mushroom, the cultivated version may be purchased from Chinese grocery stores, where they come in fresh and dried forms.

The dried form of the mushroom would have to be reconstituted in water before it can be chopped up finely and used in the desired dish. If one opts to forage for this mushroom, simply search for woodlands that have conifers or hardwood trees, or with the fallen logs of either type of tree, as one would be more likely to find the wood-ear mushroom in that environment. The mushroom is, oddly enough, shaped like an ear, and is just as rubbery and pliable as a person's ear, so one can easily twist it and it would be able to withstand a certain amount of torque exerted. One would have to look closely, as the coloration is similar enough to the wood it grows on that one can overlook the mushroom. Once found, however, they are easily collected and cleaned. Culinary applications of wood ear mushrooms see them used to provide a complementary texture to soups and stir-fried dishes such as noodles. More veteran cooks or at least those more well-versed in other forms of Chinese dishes see the wood-ear mushroom used as a filling for dumplings, which may be eaten as is as a dim sum, or added to the soup to fortify the mushroom flavor if the wood ear was used as an ingredient in the stock. Dried versions of the wood ear, once rehydrated, can reach up to 6 inches (15.2 cms) across, and would need to be chopped finely to be able to use in other dishes, as it can be quite rubbery to chew on if left in larger pieces. The wood-ear lends itself well to preservation as a dried mushroom, as established earlier.

6 MUSHROOMS BY FAMILY (GILLED)

This section starts with a cautionary tale, as from this mushroom onwards in the book, belongs to the family of gilled mushrooms. This family of mushrooms are both familiar and unfamiliar, as one would be more accustomed to the button mushroom, perhaps the most ubiquitous type of cultivated mushroom there is, which is a gilled mushroom and a member of the *Agaricus* family. This may lead to the false impression that gilled mushrooms are quite safe to eat when they really are not.

Some of the deadlier mushrooms are gilled mushrooms, and most cases of mushroom-related poisoning can be attributed to the improperly identified mushroom that has been picked by a mushroom forager who failed to correctly identify an edible mushroom species. It is recommended that one should exercise extreme caution if one chooses to continue the mushroom harvest of this type of mushroom. Abundant, these mushrooms may be, but so is the danger that lurks under any cap, as even the more innocuous mushrooms may potentially conceal lethal toxins.

There are few gilled mushrooms that are considered edible, even by the standards of the continental Europeans, who gather only what is known to them to be edible and eschew the unfamiliar or what was not taught to them to be edible. It would be wise to take the cue from them, and ignore what is not familiar, or if one is in doubt, forego the mushroom and opt for the cultivated varieties. The risk is lesser contrasted with the improper identification of a gilled mushroom.

6.1 Agaricus Mushrooms

This family of mushrooms may start with a scientific name, however, the species that comprise the edible mushrooms in this family are extremely familiar. The button mushroom, for one, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is a member of this family, as are the relatives of the button mushroom, the cremini (chestnut) and portobello mushrooms. There is the need to clear up some misconceptions however, as one can misconstrue the Button Mushroom as different from the Cremini, when in fact, they are simply the same species, grown under different circumstances.

Pink Bottom Mushroom (*Agaricus campestris*)

Horse Mushroom (*Agaricus arvensis*)

The prince (*Agaricus augustus*)

Spring Agaricus (*Agaricus bitorquis*)

White Button Mushroom (*Agaricus bisporus* / *Agaricus brunnescens*)

Common Name: Pink Bottom, Horse Mushroom, the Prince, Spring Agaricus, White Button Mushroom, Button Mushroom, Cremini, Portobello

Location: Collectively, these mushrooms may be found growing on the ground, where they may be found in urbanized parklands and

playgrounds, large forests, and woodlands.

- Pink Bottom Mushrooms are found in the lawns where they may grow as a mass or arranged on the fairy rings.
- Horse Mushrooms are more commonly found in lawns, where they can be identified from the pattern of fairy rings on the said lawn.
- The Prince Mushrooms are more commonly found in the woodlands.
- The Spring Agaricus mushrooms are found in the urbanized and suburban parklands.

Dimensions: These are dependent on the particular mushroom as some can grow from one to four inches across (2.5 to 10 cms). The height is also variable on the maturity of the mushroom.

Cap:

- Pink Bottom Mushrooms are small, with a white to brown, smooth-textured cap, attached to a short stem, and bright pink gills while still young.
- Horse Mushrooms are large and white mushrooms, that turn yellow when bruised.
- The Prince Mushrooms are large, yellowish-brown mushrooms, with a scaly texture and a square-shaped cap. The flesh of the cap turns yellow once bruised.
- Spring Agaricus Mushrooms are large mushrooms, with a brown cap, attached to a short stem.
- All the gills start out as pink but gradually turn dark brown once the mushroom begins to mature.

Stalk: Collectively, this genus of mushrooms has a central stem with a veil-like membrane that covers immature gills. Once the mushroom matures, the veil becomes a ring of tissue around the stem once the cap expands and the gills are able to be freer in their arrangement.

- Pink Bottom Mushrooms have a short, slender stem to which their caps are attached to.

- The Spring Agaricus mushroom has a short stem with a veil on it.

Distinctive Features:

- The Pink Bottom Mushroom has a mushroom scent, and may potentially grow into a mess, or around the areas where the fairy rings have expanded to.
- The Horse Mushrooms have a scent evocative to that of Anise, or Almonds.
- The Prince Mushrooms have a scent reminiscent to that of Aniseed or Almond Extract.
- The Spring Agaricus Mushroom smells strongly of mushrooms.

Lookalikes: The *Agaricus* family of mushrooms has so many species that are dangerous lookalikes to it.

- *Agaricus xanthodermus* complex is found in lawns, and smells like medicine.
- *Amanita virosa* (Destroying Angel) may be found in the open woodlands and lawns that have oak trees or conifers.
- *Chlorophyllum molybdites* (Green-Spored Lepiota) is commonly found on lawns.

Seasonality: The forager may find mushrooms from the summer to the fall months.

Soil Type: It prefers to thrive in substrate media with a high nitrogen content, whether cultivated or wild.

Caution: Extra caution must be taken to ensure that the mushroom is not only the correct genus, but also the correct species. The Agaricus mushrooms may be edible yes, but must always undergo some form of culinary preparation, as one should never consume any *Agaricus* species raw. It is imperative that one properly identifies the mushroom before it is taken for consumption.

The button mushroom, which is a member of this family of mushrooms, is often the first exposure of a person to a mushroom. Needless to say, if one does enjoy the taste of this mushroom, they

might come to enjoy the other species of mushrooms later on, in accordance with the cultural traditions of whether or not a group of people are classified to be mushroom lovers or mushroom haters. That aside, one might be mistaken with the notion that the mushrooms here are generally bland in appearance, as button mushrooms are often those small morsels that one can find canned in the grocery, or in a Cream of Mushroom soup; or one might also find the fresh, cultivated versions in baskets. Cremini and Portobello mushrooms are simply button mushrooms grown and matured under different circumstances, and thus would give a whole new experience to the flavor of the mushroom. These three types of the button mushroom for one, are among the more commonly cultivated varieties of mushrooms, as they are grown in a carefully controlled environment. The remainder of the wild species, however, have their own seasonality. From the name, the Spring Agaricus mushroom is one that appears in the midst of spring, at a time when the morels have ceased the appearance of their fruiting bodies. The Pink Bottom and the Prince Mushrooms are those that are found in the summer months, whereas the Horse Mushroom makes its appearance in the late autumn. It would be apparent then, that there would be edible varieties of the *Agaricus* mushrooms for every season save winter. While this would tempt a person to engage in a more mushroom forward diet, the large varieties of *Agaricus* would give pause for caution, as though these four species are edible, alongside the cultivated button, cremini and portobello, there numerous other species that are of the same family that are just deadly, and other species that look similar and are also deadly.

- The Green-Spored Lepiota as mentioned earlier in the table, is one of these deadly look-alike species, as it can cause severe cases of emesis or vomiting if ingested. These are identifiable by their white caps and white gills while still young; though the gills turn gray-green once they mature, compared to the dark brown of the *Agaricus*.
- The Destroying Angel of the *Amanita* genus has a white stalk and a white cap at the edge, where the color transitions to either yellow, pink, or tan as they grow closer to the center of the cap. The stem has a partial veil on it, and the gills are not attached to the stalk.

One would have to consider then, why bother with the risk if there are so few species of this family that are edible. For one, it would be a complete waste if one just neglected the mushrooms simply because there are a lot of bad species out there. Two, the effort required in the proper identification of the mushrooms in the wild is compensated by the flavor contributed to the dishes that they are added to. They are able to assimilate various flavor profiles and meld these with their own unique taste to produce the *umami* that makes a dish so special in its meatiness and savoriness. The risk is there yes, but more often than not, this is attributed to a case of mistaken identity as those who are familiar with wild mushrooms in their area might mistake a local mushroom for an edible species in their home and pick it. The mushrooms of this family are quite versatile, as one can glean from a recipe book or two, and several cooking shows. They are excellent as the basis for a mushroom duxelle, which is often wrapped around the classic Beef Wellington as another layer of added flavor or eaten on its own as a side dish. The caps of the portobello and cremini mushrooms may be grilled as a substitute for steaks or stuffed to make appetizers such as the stuffed mushroom caps. The caps also take well to marinades, though they should be cooked soon. The structure of the caps allows the mushroom to be dried, though the most ideal means to preserve them is to cook the mushrooms as desired and freeze as is to ensure that the mushrooms are in their most ideal flavor state.

6.2 Oyster Mushrooms

The Oyster Mushroom is available year-round, or as close to year-round as possible, and is able to even thrive and fruit even with the slightest rise in temperature in winter. It is a mushroom that is able to fruit several times a year, and thus the forager can develop the knack to frequent a tree where these mushrooms are known to appear and return every month or so to identify if the tree and the fungus has begun to put forth the familiar oyster mushroom. While it is available in most seasons, one has to account for the seasonal variance in appearance for the oyster mushroom so one would have to keep a keen eye out for these. For instance, the summer variety of Oyster Mushrooms are often thinner and whiter. In the winter months, the Oyster Mushroom becomes thicker and slightly rubbery, which allows the mushroom to resist the effects of frost, and the color changes from white to gray or a gray-tinged brown. If one can find Oyster Mushrooms in the wild, then one can frequent the tree to ensure that they have a steady supply of oyster mushrooms.

Oyster Mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*)

Common Name: Oyster Mushrooms

Location: Commonly attached to trees, in the urbanized parks and forests; fallen logs, and tree stumps.

Dimensions: May reach 2 to 5 inches (5 to 12.5 cms) across.

Cap: The cap is the most visible part of the mushroom, as it can reach a span of 2 to 5 inches (5 to 12.5 cms) across. The color of the cap may range from pure white to gray to brown, where the texture of the cap may be fleshy to flabby and smooth. The underside of the cap will show white gills that can extend to the base of the mushroom. The resultant spore-print will yield a white to lilac-gray color.

Stalk: May have a short stem, or no stem at all. Some varieties of the cultivated mushroom would yield a short stem that may be slender or thick depending on the maturity of the fungus.

Distinctive Features: The mushrooms tend to grow in clusters and resemble white fans that have attached to a tree or a log, or even tree stumps.

Lookalikes:

- *Lentinellus* is a genus that looks similar to the Oyster Mushroom, however, the edges of the gills are serrated or toothed, and the cap is hairy rather than smooth. It cannot be eaten not because it is poisonous, but because of the intensity of the bitterness of the mushroom.
- *Crepidotus* is a genus that has smaller caps in comparison and has a brown spore print.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushrooms all year, attached to hardwood trees. Their appearance, however, is dependent on the presence of rain and the occurrence of mild weather. The mushroom may even appear in the winter thaws.

Soil Type: It prefers to thrive in substrate media such as sawdust, coconut coir, ground coffee, banana leaves and a variety of other substrates.

Caution: The forager should take care to only forage and consume the oyster mushrooms that are young and fresh. They should not be infested with any insects. To be assured of the purity of the mushrooms, the forager may soak the mushrooms in a solution of saltwater. Rinse each mushroom thoroughly and pat dry. Do not

worry about the absorption of water by the mushroom as the water will be released once the mushrooms have been cooked. The Oyster Mushroom and its white coloration belongs to a genus known for the white spores that it produces, which will be evident if the forager takes a spore print of the mushroom in question. Unlike most mushrooms, the stem of the oyster mushroom, if present, will be articulated to the side of the mushroom, rather than a central stalk like the more common forms of mushrooms one can find. The oyster mushrooms that one can find in the grocery and other specialty shops is virtually the same type of mushroom that one can find in the wild, so the mushroom hunter can weigh the benefits of the effort needed to prepare for the search for the mushroom, or simply purchase the mushrooms from the nearby shops. There is no difference with the flavor of the wild and cultivated versions of the mushrooms, and they may be prepared in the same ways. The more traditional means to cook the oyster mushroom would be to gently saute it in a pan with some butter and garlic, for the traditional butter-garlic mushrooms. This would render the mushrooms a softer texture. It is entirely possible to roast the mushrooms or broil them to add some crispiness to the texture and provide an interesting flavor contrast. A newer vogue in how oyster mushrooms may be cooked, is to dip them in a light batter and either dredge them in panko breadcrumbs or fry as is, tempura style. This would result in what is called vegan fried chicken, and while it can be a bit fatty, it really is reminiscent of chicken due to the texture of the mushrooms. It makes for a wonderful appetizer or main course. Provided that the oyster mushroom looks fresh, they may be consumed at any time they are found, even in the winter months. The forager though would have to consider the difference in the thickness of the flesh of the mushrooms, as those gathered in the late fall to winter months may be thicker than usual and would need to be chopped or sliced finely to ensure that they may be eaten and rendered digestible. The smaller the oyster mushroom is, the better, though the thicker mushrooms are still just as edible as the rest of the mushroom.

There are other varieties of the oyster mushroom available on the market, such as the white trumpet mushroom, and the king oyster. The latter resembles a radish with the visible mushroom head with the gilled underside at one of the ends of the mushroom. It is of a

different species however, *Pleurotus eryngii*. There is a yellow variety of oyster mushroom known as the *Pleurotus citrinopileatus*. The Beech mushrooms were once thought to be part of the oyster mushroom family but were genetically aligned with the *Hypsizygus* genus rather than the *Pleurotus* genera. Scientifically, the oyster mushroom is known to be a carnivorous mushroom, albeit, one would have to modify the connotation of carnivorous. One does not expect the mushroom to act in the way of a sundew or a pitcher plant of the *Nepenthes* species, but the mushroom does feed on the putrefaction of the meat. That aside, the Oyster Mushroom has taken up a more novel utilization in the clean-up of oil slicks, where the mushrooms are able to take in the oil.

6.3 Honey Mushrooms

The honey mushroom is a curious type of mushroom, as it answers the question of what would be the largest living thing on the planet. One would ask then; how can a mushroom be the largest organism on the planet? The mushroom is not the size of a blue whale, or even an elephant. Aspen trees were once thought to be the largest organisms too, what with the recent revelation of an underground root system that sends up shoots of aspen trees to form a forest of aspens in a given area. The honey mushroom, however, trumps these two, as the spread of the honey mushroom encompasses vast miles of acreage that effectively makes it larger than either of the aforementioned candidates.

Ringless Honey Mushroom (*Armillaria tabascens*)

Common Name: Ringless Honey Mushroom

Location: Commonly found on the ground where it tends to grow on wood that has been interred, or on the root systems of various trees. It is a very proliferative mushroom that can span a wide range of locations in a biome.

Dimensions: This is a markedly different species from the ringless honey mushroom where they may reach up to an inch or two, (2.5 to 5 cms) high.

Cap: The cap is the most visible part of the mushroom, with yellow brown to pinkish-brown dry caps that have erect dark scales at the

center of the cap. The underside of the cap would reveal white to pinkish gills, with some attached to a descending stalk if present.

Stalk: The stalks of the mushroom are off-white in color and fibrous in texture. There is no veil that covers the gills or the ring on the stem.

Distinctive Features: The mushrooms tend to grow in clusters, either medium or large in composition.

Lookalikes: *Galerina, Jack O'Lantern and Big Laughing Gym Mushrooms* may be mistaken for the honey mushroom.

Seasonality: The forager may find this type of mushroom in the autumn months.

Soil Type: While it appears to thrive on the ground, it actually grows on wood, so it has no preferred soil types. Rather, one can search for the Ringless Honey Mushroom on the bases of hardwood trees, though they prefer oak trees.

Caution: The forager should take care to only forage and consume the fresh ringless honey mushrooms as soon as they have been picked and cleaned. They do not last very long and decay rapidly. The forager should exercise precautionary measures as despite the edibility of the ringless honey mushroom, the mushrooms may still cause gastrointestinal upsets even when fully cooked.

Honey Mushroom (*Armillaria mellea* complex)

Common Name: Honey Mushroom

Location: Commonly found on the ground where it can expand across a large expanse of land. It may be found in woodlands with hardwood trees, though the fruiting bodies show a preference for oak trees.

Dimensions: The fruiting body of the honey mushroom may be quite large, and there are no consistent sizes, though medium to large sizes of the mushrooms exist.

Cap: The cap is the most visible part of the mushroom, with a yellow to buff, or pinkish-brown coloration. The caps are somehow sticky to the touch, and the center contains erect hairs or fibrils that are colored black. The underside of the cap reveals gills that are off-white to pinkish buff in color, attached, and produce a white spore print.

Stalk: The stalks of the mushroom have a ring of tissue around them, similar to a skirt, which are the remnants of a veil that once concealed the younger gills of the mushroom.

Distinctive Features: The mushrooms tend to grow in clusters, either medium or large in composition.

Lookalikes:

- *Galerina, Jack O'Lantern and Big Laughing Gym Mushrooms* may be mistaken for the honey mushroom.

Seasonality: The forager may find this type of mushroom in the autumn months.

Soil Type: While it appears to thrive on the ground, it actually grows on wood, so it has no preferred soil types. Rather, one can search for the Honey Mushroom on the bases of hardwood trees, though they prefer oak trees. Sometimes, they may be found in gardens where they are considered to be an invasive species.

Caution: The forager should take care to only forage and consume the fresh honey mushrooms as soon as they have been cleaned. They do not last very long and decay rapidly. The forager should exercise precautionary measures as despite the edibility of the honey mushroom, the mushrooms may still cause stomach upsets even when fully cooked.

The honey mushroom then has a fruiting body that is, in essence, a clone of the original mushroom, and all the other mushrooms that accompany it, are clones of the other clusters of mushrooms. Because of its immense size, it can be expected that this mushroom has a wide distribution on the planet. The capabilities of the honey mushroom are such that it can virtually expand to a variety of biomes and extend to trees and root crops. Because of its near limitless

reproductive capacity, it does not find favor with landowners and veteran gardeners due to its ability to destroy and attack any form of plant life, even those that dwell beneath the soil, as its infection of the plant life will result in a disease called root rot, which results in fatal consequences for the plant. It is also highly contagious, at least for plants, as it can transmit itself from plant to plant.

Despite the rather attractive name of the mushroom, it does not lend itself well to a variety of culinary preparations. It is best sauteed with a little fat, at which point, it may either be consumed, or stored in airtight containers and frozen for later consumption. The forager best be prepared with gastrointestinal medications if they have a sensitivity to mushrooms as some mushrooms, regardless of the length of time they are cooked, may give the forager an upset stomach.

6.4 Shaggy Mane Mushrooms

The Shaggy Mane Mushroom has an expansive reach throughout the Americas, as it can be found as far north as the Arctic Circle, and all the way down south to the landmass of Tierra Del Fuego, towards the reach of the Antarctic Circle. Despite the extensiveness of the territory, one cannot find the Shaggy Mane Mushrooms in the tropical regions of the Americas, as they tend to adhere to the more temperate areas of the continental region. This is not the only variety that exists in this mushroom, as it can be found at various elevations, from sea level to higher altitudes. Summarily, if one would wish to narrow the locale where the Shaggy Mane Mushroom may be found, one would only have to look to the temperate regions of Canada, and the United States. It may also be found in temperate regions across the globe. The unusual characteristic of the Shaggy Mane mushrooms stems from its classification as part of the inky cap family of mushrooms. This is in reference to the fact that once the caps of the mushrooms have fully expanded, the mushrooms collectively dissolve into an inky substance, where other mushrooms just wither and vanish once they have dispersed their spores. This method is referred to as when the mushrooms delicate. This is a characteristic of the *Coprinus* family of mushrooms. The forager should note that these mushrooms are extremely fragile, and extreme care should be undertaken when it is handled or gathered.

Shaggy Mane Mushroom (*Coprinus comatus*)

Common Name: Shaggy Mane Mushroom

Location: Commonly found growing on the ground in grasslands, at the base of trees, tree stumps, wood mulch and manure piles.

Dimensions: The Shaggy Mane Mushroom can reach 3 to 6 inches (7.5-15 cm) in height.

Cap: The cap is the most visible part of the mushroom, with a shaggy, scaly, white cap, that opens at the base of the cap and expands upwards. As they flatten outwards, they begin to turn dark and inky as the spores begin to mature. The gills are tightly packed but later turn black and inklike once they begin to mature.

Stalk: The stalks of the mushroom are fibrous and hollow in the middle, and are colored white to a light tan, and have a partial veil on the stalk.

Distinctive Features: The mushrooms tend to grow in clusters, either medium or large in composition.

Lookalikes: None. The other species in this genus do not share the same cylindrical white caps.

Seasonality: Foragers may find this type of mushroom in May and September in North America.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in soils that are nutritionally rich and fertile, more so if the land has been disturbed or tilled recently. One may also find these types of mushrooms on manure piles as these are nutritionally rich substrates that the mushroom tends to favor. The usual precautions apply when mushrooms are harvested from manure piles.

Caution: The forager should take care to only forage and consume the mushroom whose caps are young and white.

The fact that the mushroom dissolves into an inky mess should not deter the forager from its harvest for their personal consumption as the mushroom is still considered as a delicacy. The stem of the mushroom is quite short in grassy areas, though if the grass is deeper or longer, the stem tends to extend upwards. While the caps have not yet expanded, this is the precise point where the mushroom is

considered edible. It is extremely fragile however, and care should be taken not to roughly handle it.

This type of mushroom does not take well to direct applications of heat, and it is not recommended that these mushrooms be sauteed in butter or oil, as one would other mushrooms. These are better off steamed and served with a butter or cream-based sauce, perhaps a hollandaise or a bearnaise to pair with. These mushrooms may be used after a few days provided the forager stores these in a jar filled with ice water.

To preserve the mushrooms, one should cook them in a bit of water, season them and allow the mushrooms to cool. The mushrooms should be then pureed in a food processor or blender; and poured into freezer-safe containers to be frozen. To use, one can simply partition the frozen mushrooms and add them directly into a pot filled with stock or water and brought to a boil alongside the other ingredients needed for the soup.

6.5 Matsutake Mushrooms

From the name alone, one can definitely assume that this mushroom is Japanese in origin, whereas its other name is the Pine Mushroom. In that part of the world, this mushroom is pricey, as it can fetch up to high prices in Japanese markets. This book, however, is more concerned with the North American part of the world, and one can find the Matsutake mushroom in more common environments in the country, and with a lower price tag, should one exert the effort to do so.

Matsutake

White Matsutake *Tricholoma magnivelare* (*Armillaria ponderosa*)

Brown Matsutake *Tricholoma caligatum* (*Armillaria caligata*)

Note: This mushroom has two sets of scientific names as it has been classified in another genus in the past.

Common Name: White Matsutake, Brown Matsutake, Pine Mushroom

Location: The forager may find the matsutake mushroom on mountainous land, in woodlands, where it is usually attached to conifer trees.

Dimensions: The Matsutake may span 2 to 7 inches (5 to 20 cms) across.

Cap: The cap of the matsutake may be either white or brown, with a scaly texture and appearance. The underside of the mushroom would show white, attached gills, and yield a white spore print when subjected to the spore print test.

Stalk: Above the sheath, or the ring of tissue around the stem, the stem is colored white. Below this ring, are scales or patches.

Distinctive Features: The mushrooms are quite fleshy, medium-sized, and robust.

Lookalikes: The White Matsutake may share a physical resemblance with the White Russula and the *Amanita smithiana* for the foragers in the Pacific Northwest. The Brown Matsutake may be confused with the *Tricholoma zelleri* in the western United States but does not have the odor and flavor of the Brown Matsutake.

Seasonality: The forager may find this type of mushroom only in the fall months.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in sandy soils, where conifers abound. It also prefers sandy or gravel-rich glacial soils – those soils on which glaciers have been retreated.

Caution: There are no specific cautions for the Matsutake Mushrooms.

The Matsutake mushroom has been established to be a highly prized mushroom for the Japanese, and one would also find these hotly contested in places where they may be foraged, North America included. These mushrooms cannot be cultivated and thus one would have to change them or hope for the circumstances for these mushrooms to flourish in the coniferous forests near them.

The White Matsutake Mushrooms in North America may be found in the northeastern Rocky Mountains, and in the coniferous forests of the Pacific Northwest. The Brown Matsutake on the other hand may be found in the Rocky Mountain regions of the United States, where it may be harvested. The stems are somewhat slender, and have a different color, but they carry the same olfactory and flavor profiles as the White Matsutake. Cooks describe the Matsutake mushroom as

one that has a spicy aroma and flavor, and it is quite pungent, and the other scents are evocative of the woods in which it thrives. The mushroom should first be wiped with a moistened paper towel to remove any particulates. Do not wash this mushroom. The mushroom can then be diced, or sliced to ensure that all of its parts, including the stem, may be eaten. They may be used in stir-fried rice as the Japanese would or cooked in a soup broth. They are also substantial enough to be grilled. While the mushrooms may be dried, they do not retain their flavor at all once this takes place, and the preservation will have been for naught. It is noted that this mushroom will require a permit from the US Forest Service before foragers are allowed to pick the mushroom, as it can damage the soil on which the mushrooms and the trees grow.

6.6 Shrimp Russula

The shrimp russula, and the crab russula; are among the easier gilled mushrooms that a forager may recognize. One would have to look to the ground and spot the colored caps which can range from red to purple, and even yellow caps, with white gills and stems that are highly brittle and have a chalk-like texture. The Russula looks like it has gone through the wringer, as it looks like it has been chewed on. Its brittleness is a key factor to determine if the mushroom is part of this genus as the mushroom can be thrown against a hard surface. Typically, the *Russula* fragments into several hundred pieces once thrown. Despite the ease in identification, one would find a hard time in the differentiation of one type of *Russula* from another. There are only a few that are edible, while the other species- though not poisonous- are simply too unremarkable or are otherwise unpalatable to warrant any further discussion.

Russula (*Russula xerampelina*)

Common Name: Shrimp Russula, Crab/Crabmeat Russula

Location: The forager may find the Russula growing on the ground. The best ones are usually found in the Rocky Mountains, though the mushrooms are widely distributed across North America. They may also be commonly found in British Columbia.

Dimensions: The Russula may be 2 to 4 inches (5 to 10 cms) across, 2 to 3 inches (5 to 7.5 cms) high.

Cap: The cap of the mushroom is quite fleshy and solid. The caps are red to purple in color, with attached gills on the underside, the gills are off-white to yellow in color. The spore print if taken, will be white.

Stalk: The stem is white with a slightly pink tinge closer to the base. Friction on the stem will change the color to an olive or yellow-brown color.

Distinctive Features: The gills of the mushroom emit an aroma that is reminiscent to that of crab meat or shrimp. If there is no perceptible scent, seal the mushrooms in a paper bag and leave for 10 minutes. Once the bag is opened, the scent should be detectable. If no scent is detected, discard the mushrooms, and try to search for other mushrooms.

Lookalikes: Other *Russulas* include the *Russula emetica* and other species that have an unpleasant bitter taste. These have red caps. They may be mixed in with the more edible Russula.

Seasonality: The forager may find this type of mushroom only in the summer to fall months, under hardwood trees and conifers.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in sandy soils, where conifers abound. It also prefers sandy or gravel-rich glacial soils – those soils on which glaciers have been retreated.

Caution: There are no specific cautions for the Russula. Be sure to clean the mushroom thoroughly and ensure it is free of insects and insect larvae.

One of the advantages of the Shrimp or Crab Russula is the similar flavor profile to the crustaceans they are eponymously named. Once finely sliced, and integrated into pasta dishes, one can virtually taste the essence of the sea, despite the distance from it, given the area in which these mushrooms are foraged. All one would need to do is to sauté the sliced mushrooms and make it as the base for a sauce and pour over pasta. Once sauteed, the mushrooms may then be frozen and preserved for later use.

6.7 Milk Caps

One of the first introductions of the reader to the milk cap was as the potential host of the parasite that renders an inedible or plain mushroom into the more sublime lobster mushroom. The mushroom hunter will now know that milk caps are one of the more well-populated genus of gilled mushrooms, though, despite this apparent abundance, there have only been a few species deemed noteworthy enough to be edible. *Lactarius* as this family is scientifically known as, derives from the characteristic where, if one makes an incision into the gills, the mushroom exudes a liquid similar to latex in texture, either white or colored, from which the species derives its more common name.

Orange Milk Cap (*Lactarius deliciosus*; *Lactarius deterrimus*)

Common Name: Orange Milk Cap, Orange Milky, Delicious Milky

Location: The forager may find the Orange Milk Cap may be found in areas of North America where there are coniferous forests on the ground.

Dimensions: The cap may span 1 to 4 inches (3-10 cms) and may reach a height of 1.5-3 inches (4-8 cms).

Cap: The cap of the mushroom is distinctively orange, where the surface of the cap has concentric circles that emanate from the center. The gills are also orange-colored, and when cut into, will release an orange latex-like fluid. The spore print will be cream colored.

Stalk: The stem will have large age markings to denote the age of the mushroom.

Distinctive Features: The mushroom once cut into exudes the orange latex from the gills, and if the whole mushroom is bruised, it will turn green. This may also happen if the mushroom begins to mature.

Lookalikes: There are other species of orange milk caps, and some of these species exude a reddish latex rather than orange. Though there are other species that may be found in Mexico, none of them are poisonous.

Seasonality: The forager may find this type of mushroom only in the summer and early weeks of fall, under coniferous trees.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in sandy soils, where conifers abound.

Caution: The forager should always be on the lookout for the color of the latex exuded once the mushroom has been cut into. If there is no latex, one should search for the concentric circles on the caps. A clue to determine edibility would be, if the mushroom turns green once bruised, it is an edible species of the orange milk cap.

The orange milk cap is just one among several species of similarly characterized milk caps that may be found throughout the world, where the most distinctive characteristic is its tendency to exude the orange latex once the forager cuts into the gills of the mushroom. The other types of orange milk cap may have some variance in the flavor; however, all remain to be edible species. They are best sauteed or pickled, and to preserve them, they may either be pickled and stored in an airtight jar; or sauteed and frozen in a freezer-safe container for later use.

Fish Milk Cap (*Lactarius volemus*; *Lactarius hygrophoroides*; *Lactarius corrugis*)

Common Name: Fish Milk Cap, Corrugated Milk Cap, Hygrophrous Milky, Voluminous Latex Milky

Location: The forager may find the Orange Milk Cap may be found in the eastern United States, where they are found on or close to Eastern Oaks. They may not be found west of the 100th Meridian.

Dimensions: The cap may reach from 2 to 4.5 inches (5 to 11 cms) wide, while the stem can reach from 1.5 to 5 inches (4-12 cms).

Cap: The cap of the mushroom has a smooth, velvety surface, that ranges in shades of apricot to a tawny brown. The younger mushroom will have a convex cap with curved edges that flattens as the mushroom matures, and develops a depression in the center of the cap. The underside would show gills that are adnate, brittle, and narrow in their spacing. The gills may sometimes fork. They are usually a pale golden-brown color but turn brown once the mushroom is bruised. The spore print yielded is white.

Stalk: The stem will have a similar color scheme from apricot to an orange-brown color. They are quite meaty.

Distinctive Features: The mushroom once cut even with the slightest injury will exude a latex that colors objects that it comes into contact with brown. The mushroom also emits a smell similar to dead fish, hence the name.

Lookalikes: There are other species of fish milk caps, however, the latex exuded does not change color, and if tasted will be very bitter or acrid in flavor.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushroom at its peak from the middle of July to early September, though it can be foraged well into September.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in areas with Eastern Oak trees, with which it has a mycorrhizal relationship.

Caution: The forager should always wear gloves as the mushroom is cleaned as the latex that it exudes can turn any object brown.

The fish milk cap derives its name from the aroma, or stench would be the better word, of dead fish that lingers in areas where the mushroom is found. It is a mycorrhizal fungus that grows in areas

where there are eastern Oak trees, only in the eastern United States. The scientific names of the species that are mentioned in the table are the representative species that are considered worth the effort in their procurement as the mushrooms are the best of their species. Despite the fishy scent, the taste of the mushroom is mild and nutty and best brought out when sauteed in butter or oil in a shallow pan for 5 to 10 minutes. The smell of dead fish disappears once heat is applied so one would not have to pinch their nose when the mushroom is cooked. The mushrooms in addition have a very meaty texture and may be frozen once the mushrooms have been fully cooked.

Candy Cap (*Lactarius rubidus*; *Lactarius rufulus*)

Common Name: Candy Cap

Location: The forager may find the Candy Cap isolated to the western United States, and especially in California, where it grows on the ground. The *rubidus* species grows in forests of pine and oak, while the *rufulus* species grows only under oak trees.

Dimensions: The cap is quite small, at 0.7-1.7 inches (2-5 cms), with shorter stems.

Cap: The cap of the mushroom is colored a deep rusty red or reddish brown to orange, with attached gills on the underside. The gills once cut will exude a white, watery fluid that smells quite sweet, reminiscent of butterscotch once fully dried. The spore print is a cream to buff color.

Stalk: The stem will have a similar color scheme from orange to reddish-brown.

Distinctive Features: The mushroom once cut even with the slightest injury will exude a latex that smells sweet. Similarly, the sweet aroma intensifies as the mushroom is dried. The forager may smell the mushrooms to be assured of their identification. If there is no sweet scent, discard the mushroom.

Lookalikes: There are other species of candy caps that exude a white latex that transitions to yellow upon exposure to air. They also

do not carry a sweet scent. The *Lactarius xanthogalactus* is a species that is similar to this description, and it is quite bitter and acrid to the taste if one has the misfortune to try it.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushroom at its peak from November to February.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in areas with pine and oak trees, with rich, mossy soil.

Caution: The forager should always sniff the mushrooms before any use to ascertain the identity of these mushrooms. Gloves should be worn when one forages for this as poison oak thrives close to these mushrooms. From the name, one can make the reasonable assumption that this mushroom is sweet in its flavor and aroma, unlike the fish cap and the orange milk cap. Once tasted, the flavor is reminiscent to that of maple syrup, and one would have to scour the coastal areas of California populated with pine and oak to locate this delectable mushroom. It is a dessert mushroom oddly enough, and appropriately used in desserts which call for a toffee, butterscotch, or maple syrup flavor profile to which it can lend its flavor to. Cookies and quiches are good, though one can experiment with a few mousses as well to bring out the full flavor of the candy cap mushroom, as it is used more for flavor rather than its substance. Once cooked or baked in this manner, it may then be stored and frozen. One can also dry the mushroom and subsequently store it in an airtight space.

6.8 Bluefoot Mushrooms

A forager, mushroom hunter or anybody really would have to stop in their tracks to admire the beauty of the bluefoot mushroom what with its cerulean cap coloration, and the purple stem that complements the color scheme of the mushroom. Though it is available commercially in some stores all year, if one wishes to encounter the mushroom in the wild, they will have to wait until the fall months to do so. The effort to locate it, in an area and period where multicolored leaves are the norm, requires some exertion, but well worth it as this is a choice mushroom often favored by many a mushroom hunter.

Blewit/Bluefoot Mushrooms (*Lepista nuda*; *Lepista personata*) Wild and Cultivated, respectively.

Common Name: If the mushroom is wild, it is referred to as a Blewit; if the mushroom is cultivated, it is referred to as a Bluefoot.

Location: The forager may find the Candy Cap in forests populated by conifers and hardwood trees, often covered by leaves.

Dimensions: The mushroom is 2 to 4 inches (5-10 cms); and 2-3 inches (5-7.5 cms) high.

Cap: The cap of the blewit mushroom is fleshy, and ranges in color from a violet hue to tan. The underside of the cap will show gills colored violet to pink, notched, and will yield a pinkish-buff spore print when taken. The bluefoot on the other hand, has a yellow-

brown or ochre cap, and the underside would reveal pinkish to tan gills, and a long, bright purple stem.

Stalk: The stem will be violet to gray, brown in color.

Distinctive Features: The mushroom will have a distinct color that may be obscured by fallen leaves on which it prefers to grow. The color, however, may fade if the mushroom is exposed to light.

Lookalikes:

- The *Cortinarius alboviolaceus* and species in the same genus are characterized by a veil that resembles a web, found as a membrane on the underside of the cap. It also leaves a rust colored, hairy band on the upper part of the stem, and the spore print is a rust color.
- *Entoloma* species have a pinkish spore print.
- *Laccaria ochropurpurea* has a grayish-white cap and stem, and further inspection of the gills will show that they are widely spaced.

Seasonality: The forager may find the mushroom at its peak in the autumn months.

Soil Type: This mushroom thrives in areas with oak trees, where it grows on the leaf mulch made from the fallen leaves.

Caution: The forager should always cook the mushroom thoroughly.

From the name, one can tell that Blew and Blue are in reference to the color of the mushroom, though sadly the colors fade with continued exposure to sunlight. It does take some effort to locate the Blewits among the multicolored hues of the fallen leaves on which it prefers to grow on. The mushrooms also lose their color once they begin to age, which makes the color an indicator of the maturity of the mushroom, as one should cook with the younger mushrooms, rather than the matured ones. While the blewit is still unique, it must be identified correctly as there are other mushrooms that share the same color profile. The Bluefoot however, though a cultivated version of the Blewit, is not of the same color as the Blewit as its caps are yellow-brown or ochre in color, though the gills are at least similar in color to the Blewit. Despite the color difference, they have the same meaty texture and aroma. The flavor is greatly complemented by the alliums such as leeks and onions where the flavor of the mushroom is strong enough not to be overwhelmed by either aromatic. They are also used as the base of sauces, or simply sauteed in butter or olive oil. Once cooked, they may be used to fill omelets, and are meaty enough to be stewed. The mushrooms are also good pickled, and once cooked in either method, may be preserved as such.

7 MUSHROOMS OF RARITY

There are some mushrooms that are endemic to the United States and Mexico that are worth a mention, simply because it would be remiss of a mushroom hunter to overlook these tasty morsels of the earth. Again, before one forage for these mushrooms, one should always be sure of the identity of the mushroom down to its specific identifiable characteristics and should always cross check it against species that may look or carry similar traits. Once properly identified, the mushrooms should always be cleaned thoroughly, and cooked properly.

7.1 Beefsteak Mushroom (Fistulina hepatica)

The mushrooms that can be eaten raw are few and far in between, with the common button mushroom as the prime example of a mushroom that may be eaten raw as a salad. The remainder of the mushrooms that have been discussed in this book require some form of culinary application through a sauté, a roast, or a pickle before one may safely consume them. The beefsteak mushroom is a mushroom, however, that does not benefit from any application of heat and is best consumed while raw and fresh. The forager may find the Beefsteak mushroom in the form of a shelf-like fungus found on the oak trees of the eastern United States, where it grows on the bases, and may be foraged for in the spring to autumn months. The reddish caps are moist and sticky to the touch and are readily visible when viewed from afar. On the underside of the mushroom are pores, rather than gills, that are off-white in color. The pores are reminiscent to that of the ends of slender straws. The flavor of the mushroom is quite tart and disappears when cooked. It is instead sliced into strips and tossed into a salad where the meaty texture provides a savoriness and meatiness reminiscent to that of organ meats or even ham.

7.2 Hawk Wings (Sarcodon imbricatus)

The mushroom grows on the ground in woods populated by conifers in the northern part of North America. It is found in a wide stretch of area that extends from Nova Scotia in Canada to the western United States and British Columbia, but it is more plentiful in the southern Rocky Mountains, where it is at its best. The forager may harvest the mushroom in the summer months up in the mountains. The cap of the mushroom has upright scales, that aptly enough, resemble the arrangement of feathers on a bird. The brownish-gray color of the cap, when turned over will reveal a spiny underside are a distinct characteristic that helps in its identification. Any look alike mushrooms would have a smooth underside or have an extremely bitter taste. While the mushroom is prized by some chefs, those who consume it would find difficulties in how the flavor of the mushroom is as it has a certain *je ne sais quoi* quality that can be attributed to it. Despite that, the mushroom still remains a favored delicacy among mushroom hunters who prefer and enjoy its unique flavor profile.

7.3 Aborted Entoloma (Entoloma abortivum)

The name alone would certainly deter any inexperienced mushroom hunter, or for those who are generally unaware, as the name is reminiscent to that of an excised body part. The name alone is proof that one should look closely at the mushroom before judgment is passed on its merits as the mushroom is also considered to be a rare delicacy among mushroom hunters of the United States where which it grows. It is an atypical mushroom that bears a similar method of production to the lobster mushroom, in that it is actually a parasite that has altered the mushroom that became its host, to render a mushroom more improved and palatable. The host mushroom is unknown, however. The mushroom on which the parasite grows may be found in the eastern parts and in the Midwest regions of the United States, where it may be found at the base of hardwood trees in the open forests. The scientific name of the mushroom is the one listed under this section. The mushroom itself is given this name as it can appear alone or in clusters, with a small, firm, white, oddly shaped cap that resembles a misshapen puffball, or at worst, dog feces. The interior of the cap would show pink marbles within it. The mushroom has no gills on the underside. There are disputes as to which mushroom is the parasite as the mushroom itself is comprised of either the honey mushroom as a parasite to the Entoloma, or the Entoloma is the parasite of the honey mushroom. Regardless, one should be aware that the safest form to consume would be the Aborted Entoloma, as the unaborted one, despite its edibility, is one

that also has numerous look-alikes that may induce gastrointestinal upsets.

7.4 Pig's Ears (Gomphus clavatus)

Originally called the violet chanterelle, the Pig's Ear has no relation whatsoever to the chanterelle and was only given this description as it resembled the chanterelle in appearance, apart from its violet coloration. It is the only edible species of its genera and may be found by the forager on the ground in coniferous forests across North America, in the autumn months. The cap of the mushroom is appropriately enough, violet in color and shaped like a vase. The underside of the mushroom is wrinkled, which greatly aids in its identification. It has the tendency to grow in clusters and one would have no qualms about gathering enough mushrooms to satisfy one's needs. The mushroom hunter would have to be aware that it is also delectable enough for insects to feast on, and as such, the mushroom, once picked, would have to be cleaned thoroughly to ensure that no insects are part of the meal. One does not need to gather a lot though, as one would only need a few mushrooms to add color and flavor to a meal. The mushrooms have a meaty texture and a flavor reminiscent to that of cured meat, a lovely repast. The color contrast would also provide some additional hues to the dinner table.

7.5 Corn Smut (Ustilago maydis)

The corn smut or as it is marketed in Mexico, the *huitlacoche*, is a fungus that affects the maize crops or sweet corn of Mexico and the United States. It is an undesirable fungus in the United States, and while it may grow there, farmers often take preventive measures to ensure that corn smut does not affect any crop of corn. However, in Mexico, the *huitlacoche* is sold by the kilo as it is a popular ingredient in Mexican cuisine, where it holds as much reverence as the Europeans would the truffle. Once matured, the kernels turn black, and have a nutty flavor. The farmer, in this case, since this cannot be foraged, may find the corn smut at the top of the corn, where it resembles a mass of soft, grayish white, puffed out, misshapen kernels. It is not a common delicacy in the United States.

7.6 Elm Oyster (Hypsizigus ulmarius)

This is a mushroom that is readily overlooked, but not intentionally, as one would have to look up to the trees to be able to spot this mushroom when it makes its first appearance of the year in the late fall months to the early winter. From the name, the forager would have to search for elm trees to be able to find this mushroom, as it can be found at least 12 feet (2.4 m) on the trunk of the elm. The mushroom tends to grow in pairs, where the caps can reach up to a foot (30.5 cms) across, though smaller at times. There are no stems as the mushroom attaches itself to the tree. The elm oyster is usually found only in the eastern United States from November to January, though it makes an appearance as early as the late parts of October to the late parts of February. The mushroom would require some effort to retrieve, as one cannot simply knock off the mushroom due to its fragility. This is a two-person job, where one person tried to either knock or saw it off with a piece of twine, and another person to catch it before it hit the ground. It is well worth the effort as the mushroom is meatier than an oyster mushroom, to which it has no relation, and has a better flavor than the oyster mushroom. It does take some time to cook as with the king oyster but can otherwise take on the same culinary preparations as one would with the oyster mushroom.

7.7 Velvet Foot (Flammulina velutipes)

Commonly known as the wild enoki in Japan, and as the Winter Mushroom in North America, this is a mushroom that thrives in the hardwood trees of winter such as the maple, elm, and willow. The mushroom may be found in the hollows and nooks of these trees in which it makes its home, or beneath the bark of a dead elm, in the middle of winter. They tend to grow in clusters on whatever substrate they may find. The caps are yellowish orange colored and sticky to the touch while still fresh. The underside would show white gills that yield a white spore print. The lower parts of the stem, once fully matured, have a velvety brown cover. The mushrooms make a hearty basis for a soup or stir-fried into other vegetable dishes. One would have to trim the fibrous stems and only use the caps.

7.8 Conclusion

Chapters 5,6 and 7 of this book provide mushrooms of all varieties that may be found in North America in specific environments and conditions. From this, one can glean that there are more to mushrooms than what is seen in the market. It is necessary then to ensure that one is able to identify the mushrooms that have been found, not only by sight, but by smell, and even touch, as each mushroom has characteristics that specifically detail it as an edible species and not a poisonous lookalike. The mushrooms and their more important characteristics have been outlined in a table form for ease of information access, along with their look-alikes and how to distinguish the edible species from them. There are some mushrooms that are readily identifiable, and somewhere the work of the forager is cut out for them. That said, it is imperative that once found and identified correctly, the mushrooms always be cleaned properly as provided for in the instructions under each entry. This would ensure that the forager would be able to enjoy the mushrooms carefully foraged safely. As for the culinary applications, these are merely suggestions and do not necessarily have to be followed by the T. The more creative cooks are free to experiment with what works for them, and each method may have their own alterations and substitutions made. It is a matter of taste after all, and what works for one may not necessarily work for the other. What is important is that the forager is able to enjoy the fruits of their labor, and that includes the proper identification, the preparation and the methods used to cook the mushrooms. Apart from that, one can wish the mushroom hunter a fruitful forage for the future.

8 PREPARATIONS FOR THE POISONOUS MUSHROOM

While the steps that have been undertaken in this book ensure that one would not actively select a mushroom that is poisonous or can cause any form of physical ailment, it would be necessary to include this chapter for those moments when the forager is less than vigilant, and inadvertently adds a bad mushroom to the mix. While some mushrooms are mild in their effects and stomach upsets are the main symptom, other mushrooms are deadlier and may often produce fatal effects if left untreated. As the old maxim goes "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" so it would be best to know what can be done, when the mushroom hunt goes south.

Mushroom	Destroying Angel
Scientific Name	*Amanita virosa*; *Amanita bisporigera*; *Amanita ocreata*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Symptoms of Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Cramps manifest in 8 to 12 hours. Monitor liver enzyme levels for 24 hours.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Parasol lepiota, Agaricus mushrooms
Treatment	There is a false recovery period, after which there is symptomatic liver and kidney failure; Intravenous Milk Thistle based medications have seen success in Europe, where full recovery takes place in two weeks.
Mushroom	**Death Cap**
Scientific Name	*Amanita phalloides*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Symptoms of Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Cramps manifest in 8 to 12 hours. Monitor liver enzyme levels for 24 hours.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Green Russula, Agaricus mushrooms

Treatment	There is a false recovery period, after which there is symptomatic liver and kidney failure; Intravenous Milk Thistle based medications have seen success in Europe, where full recovery takes place in two weeks.
Mushroom	Deadly Galerina
Scientific Name	*Galerina autumnalis*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Symptoms of Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Cramps manifest in 8 to 12 hours. Monitor liver enzyme levels for 24 hours.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Honey Mushroom, Magic Mushroom
Treatment	There is a false recovery period, after which there is symptomatic liver and kidney failure; Intravenous Milk Thistle based medications have seen success in Europe, where full recovery takes place in two weeks.
Mushroom	Deadly Lepiota
Scientific Name	*Lepiota spp*. a small mushroom that can be overlooked.
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Symptoms of Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Cramps manifest in 8 to 12 hours. Monitor liver enzyme levels for 24 hours.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Parasol lepiota
Treatment	There is a false recovery period, after which there is symptomatic liver and kidney failure; Intravenous Milk Thistle based medications have seen success in Europe, where full recovery takes place in two weeks.
Mushroom	Deadly Conocybe
Scientific Name	*Conocybe filaris* a small, easily overlooked mushroom

Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Symptoms of Nausea, Vomiting, Diarrhea, Cramps manifest in 8 to 12 hours. Monitor liver enzyme levels for 24 hours.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Magic Mushrooms
Treatment	There is a false recovery period, after which there is symptomatic liver and kidney failure; Intravenous Milk Thistle based medications have seen success in Europe, where full recovery takes place in two weeks.
Mushroom	Deadly Corts
Scientific Name	*Cortinarius spp.*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Progressive nausea and vomiting starting in 2 days to 2 weeks from initial consumption.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Chanterelle
Treatment	One can only care for the symptoms, as there is no cure. Dialysis may be recommended in the event of kidney failure. Severe cases may have a prolonged recovery period.
Mushroom	False Morel
Scientific Name	*Gyromitra esculenta*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Nausea, Vomiting, Cramps, Diarrhea, Internal Bleeding within 2 to 24 hours after consumption.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Morels
Treatment	One can only care for the symptoms and remedy each as they manifest.
Mushroom	Sweater
Scientific	*Clitocybe dealbata*

Name	
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Diaphoresis (Excessive Sweating); Tears, Salivation, Visual Changes, Irregular Pulse Rate and Shortness of Breath. This takes place within 30 minutes to 8 hours after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Marasmius oreades*
Treatment	One can only care for the symptoms and remedy each as they manifest. Atropine Sulfate is used as an emergency medication.
Mushroom	Fiber Caps
Scientific Name	*Inocybe spp.*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Diaphoresis (Excessive Sweating); Tears, Salivation, Visual Changes, Irregular Pulse Rate and Shortness of Breath. This takes place within 30 minutes or more after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Marasmius oreades*
Treatment	One can only care for the symptoms and remedy each as they manifest.
Mushroom	Panther
Scientific Name	*Amanita pantherine*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Confusion, Visual Distortion, Deep Sleep, Perception of Delusions, and tendency to act out, within 30 minutes to 2 hours after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Agaricus spp.;* Honey Mushrooms

Treatment	Supportive care, with overnight recovery.
Mushroom	Fly Agaric
Scientific Name	*Amanita muscaria*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Confusion, Visual Distortion, Deep Sleep, Perception of Delusions, and tendency to act out within 30 mins to 2 hours after consumption of mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Amanita caesaria complex* (Caesar's mushroom)
Treatment	Supportive care, with overnight recovery.
Mushroom	Magic Mushrooms
Scientific Name	*Psilocybe spp.*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Increased sensory awareness, Hallucinations, Anxiety, Delusions within 45 mins to an hour after consumption of mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Agaricus* spp. and *Marasmius oreades*
Treatment	Supportive care, with recovery in 4 hours.
Mushroom	Big Laughing Gym
Scientific Name	*Gymnopilus spectabilis*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Excessive Giddiness and Laughter, Delusions, and a sense of profound insights within 45 mins to an hour after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Honey Mushroom
Treatment	Recovers in 4 or more hours.
Mushroom	Big Laughing Gym
Scientific	*Gymnopilus spectabilis*

Name	
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Excessive Giddiness and Laughter, Delusions, and a sense of profound insights within 45 mins to an hour after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Honey Mushroom
Treatment	Recovers in 4 or more hours.
Mushroom	Alcohol Inky Cap
Scientific Name	*Coprinus atramentarius*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Accelerated Heart Rate/Heartbeat; Paresthesia in the extremities (tingling sensations), flushing of the skin, headaches, and on occasion, rashes within 30 minutes after the consumption of alcohol once the mushroom has been eaten. May sometimes occur days after the mushroom has been consumed.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Shaggy Mane Mushroom
Treatment	Rapid Recovery
Mushroom	Jack-O-Lantern Mushroom
Scientific Name	*Omphalotus spp*.
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Nausea, Vomiting, Stomach Cramps and Diarrhea from 30 minutes to 2 hours after the consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Chanterelles
Treatment	Care is only given for the symptoms. Recovery takes place after 24 hours.
Mushroom	Green-Spored Lepiota

Scientific Name	*Chlorophyllum molybdites*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Nausea, Vomiting, Stomach Cramps and Diarrhea within 30 minutes to 2 hours after mushrooms have been eaten.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Parasol Lepiota, *Agaricus* spp.
Treatment	Care is only provided to calm the symptoms. Recovery takes place after 24 hours.
Mushroom	Phenolic Agaricus Spp.
Scientific Name	*Agaricus xanthodermus* complex
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Nausea, Vomiting, Stomach Cramps and Diarrhea within 30 minutes to 2 hours after mushrooms have been eaten.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	Edible Agaricus species
Treatment	Care is only provided to calm the symptoms. Recovery takes place after 24 hours.
Mushroom	Boletus (those with red pores) and Satan's Boletus
Scientific Name	*Boletus* spp, (red pores); *Boletus satanus* complex
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Nausea, Vomiting, Stomach Cramps and Diarrhea within 30 minutes to 1 hour after mushrooms have been eaten.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Boletus edulis* (Porcini Mushrooms, Cepes)
Treatment	Recovery takes place within 24 hours. Take care of symptoms as they appear.
Mushroom	False King Bolete
Scientific	*Boletus huronensis*

Name	
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Severe bouts of vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps within half an hour to an hour after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Boletus edulis* (Porcini mushrooms, cepes)
Treatment	Care is only provided to calm the symptoms. Recovery takes place overnight.
Mushroom	False Bicolor
Scientific Name	*Boletus sensibilis*
Symptoms/Lab Tests Needed	Severe bouts of vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps within half an hour to an hour after consumption of the mushroom.
Edible Mushroom it may be confused with	*Boletus bicolor*
Treatment	Care is only provided to calm the symptoms. Recovery takes place overnight.

8.1 Conclusion

This chapter details the mushrooms that the forager may commonly confuse with the edible mushrooms that have been described in detail in this book. The edible mushrooms have a guide which contain the characteristics to help distinguish the edible species from the poisonous, and this would help assuage any fears, though if one feels that the mushroom picked is doubtful in its edibility, it would be best to go with the gut feel and chuck it out, or have a more experienced mushroom hunter or mycologist identify it to be safe. The symptoms are mostly centered around gastrointestinal upsets, though some such as the magic mushrooms may cause psychedelic manifestations of symptoms. This section of the guide is not intended to be the main source of treatment for the mushrooms, and thus the reader would need to head to the nearest emergency department for further treatment and prescription of the appropriate medications to assuage the symptoms. Subsequently, the times provided for in the manifestations of the symptoms of each mushroom vary from person to person, and this may either be slower or faster. The reader and forager should then immediately seek medical care if they begin to feel unwell, as this is a potentially life-threatening situation.

9 CONCLUSION

There is a lot of detail that goes into the identification of mushrooms that are edible as these may have effects that can debilitate a person, or even be lethal in their symptoms if the wrong one is picked. That said, the forager needs to be very detail-oriented in the specifics of the mushroom as they would need to identify every single part of the mushroom that bears any significance to its identification and utilize all of the senses that are available to ascertain the identity of the mushroom. The earlier chapters of this book detailed the key differences that would broadly separate one mushroom from the other, while subsequent sections detailed the various terms that the forager would have to familiarize themselves with to ensure that the identification of the mushroom becomes second nature to them. With that in mind, each mushroom has its own specific quirks that help them become more identifiable, and one may simply find them in the nearest wooded areas to their homes. The forager would have to be aware of the presence of laws and ordinances that limit their ability to pick mushrooms from their locale. They would have to have the necessary permits and licenses to be able to freely pick mushrooms, especially from national park grounds; and more importantly permission from private landowners if the mushroom is on private property. The forager then would have to look through each mushroom and their seasonality to know their peak and ensure that they get the freshest product. In the preparation of the mushroom as a comestible, the forager can depend on the guide that has been provided for, however, they may exercise a bit of creative license on their part to be able to bring out the best flavors and complements to the flavor profile of the mushroom. It is here that the preparation process remains key, as some mushrooms are hosts to various other microorganisms that need to be cleaned, and other special precautions that may be necessary. The last chapter is not meant to be a first aid section, as all the procedures there require specialized medical intervention in the event that the forager managed to inadvertently pick the odd mushroom. It would be best to forestall this eventuality through the strenuous and meticulous identification of the mushroom. Mushrooms are meant to be enjoyed as a meal after all.

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